

# Ramsden Hall School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115449
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	357752
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	James Bowden

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	93
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Geoff Williams
<b>Headteacher</b>	Stewart Grant
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 October 2007
<b>School address</b>	Heath Road Billericay CM11 1HN
<b>Telephone number</b>	01277 624580
<b>Fax number</b>	01277 631373
<b>Email address</b>	admin@ramsdenhall.essex.sch.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 July 2011
<b>Inspection number</b>	357752

<b>Boarding provision</b>	Ramsden Hall School
<b>Social care Unique Reference Number</b>	SC018026
<b>Social care inspector</b>	Kristen Judd

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The boarding provision was inspected concurrently by a social care inspector. The inspectors visited 16 lessons and observed 16 teachers. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and others with posts of responsibility. In addition, a meeting was held with the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at samples of students' books, assessment and progress files, the school's planning and other assessment records. The lead inspector analysed questionnaires from 13 parents and carers, 29 day students, 18 boarding students and 34 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Does the school have a consistent track record of improving students' achievement at the end of Key Stage 4?
- Is teaching challenging enough for students, enabling all groups to make the best progress possible?
- How effective are the school's procedures for improving attendance?
- How effective is leadership at all levels in moving the school forwards?
- How effective is the boarding provision in supporting students' learning and academic progress?

## Information about the school

Ramsden Hall School is situated on two sites some 40 miles apart. One site is close to Billericay and the other is in the village of Langham, close to Colchester. The school offers weekly boarding accommodation as well as providing for day students, some of whom travel over one hour to get to the school, including from other local authorities. All have statements of special educational needs as a result of their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Currently, approximately half of the students are boarders, with most at the Billericay site. Almost all come from White British backgrounds; a very few are from other mixed backgrounds. Nine students are looked after by the local authority. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. All students receive free lunches provided by the school. The headteacher has overall responsibility for care and education across both sites but is due to retire at the end of this academic year. Two designated headteachers, one for each site, are in place for September. The school is subject to local authority reorganisation proposals.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?****2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

## Main findings

The school provides a good quality education for its students. It is effective in meeting its core aim of supporting them in regaining confidence in themselves and encouraging students to believe in their own potential for success. This is reflected in the improving numbers achieving qualifications at the end of Year 11. The school has significant strengths which underpin students' well-being and learning. The outstanding partnerships between the care staff, the school and other professionals from outside agencies, including its own Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service counsellor, lead to high quality care, guidance and support for students. In turn, this enables them to make good progress in aspects of their personal development. All staff ensure each student is looked after in a safe, healthy and caring environment. As a result, almost all students say that the school is a safe place to learn. Their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire show all have positive views about the care, guidance and support they receive. One student commented, 'I like it here because the teachers understand me and help me through hard times.' In addition, the school works effectively in forging close links with parents and carers. Consequently, almost all are highly appreciative of all aspects of the school's work. One summed up the typical view noting, 'The help, support and flexibility given to my son's problems shows a caring beyond the norm.'

Students' attainment on entry to the school varies, but is generally lower than expected because students have not thrived in previous settings. Attainment is below average compared with mainstream schools at the end of Year 11 but broadly average in some areas. Students make good academic progress across the school and this is improving, particularly for those in Years 10 and 11. Greater numbers, for example, now follow GCSE courses. Recent GCSE results have shown an improving trend in the proportion of students attaining five A\* to G grade passes, including English and mathematics. School data show students achieve well in relation to their starting points, particularly in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), as well as making good progress in their organisational skills and independence. Students make significant progress in improving their reading ages. One student, reflecting the views of others in a student discussion group, commented, 'I have improved my learning and am more independent.' Students develop good personal and vocational skills but, because their basic skills are broadly average, they are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage of their education or training for employment.

Teaching is good and there is some outstanding, as well as satisfactory, practice. The school recognises that the latter needs to be improved in order to raise achievement. Individual targets are set and students are informed of the levels they are working at. Information and communication technology is used effectively across the school to support teaching and enliven learning. The good curriculum underpins the school's focus on preparing students for the next stage of their education. Those in the boarding houses

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benefit from a 24-hour curriculum which is effective in supporting their learning and academic progress.

The headteacher, senior leaders and managers have a clear sense of direction and purpose for the school. There is a clear focus on continuing improvement, particularly in students' personal development, teaching and learning. School self-evaluation is generally accurate and supports strategic planning well in order to move the school forward. Areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have been remedied. In addition, the school and the governing body have worked closely together to ensure a smooth transfer of the leadership reins when the headteacher retires. Designate acting headteachers for both sites have been working effectively alongside the headteacher to ensure a smooth transition. The staff support the school's ethos and have the best interests of students at heart. Curriculum content and enrichment activities support the school's promotion of community cohesion within the school itself, the local community and beyond. However, the school recognises that formal planning, monitoring and evaluation of the school's work in this respect are not honed well enough. The governing body and the school ensure procedures and practices to protect and keep students safe are given the highest priority, which has resulted in outstanding practice. In light of these strengths, the school's current capacity for sustained improvement is good.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise achievement and ensure that the quality of all teaching matches that of the best in the school by:
  - always providing students who finish their work quickly with suitable extension tasks
  - making sure that enough time is allocated to reviewing learning towards the end of lessons.
- Sharpen the quality of the planning for, and monitoring and evaluation of, the school's promotion of community cohesion.
- The school must ensure that it meets the national minimum standards for boarding which have not been met.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**2**

In lessons at both sites, students, including the very few of mixed ethnic heritage and those who are looked after by the local authority, build on their previous learning well. Having previously found it hard to cope with learning in larger mainstream schools, their appetite for learning grows as they get older and their behaviour improves. This, along with the individual targets set by teachers, supports the good progress they make overall. In a Year 10 GCSE history lesson, students looking at changes in hospital provision over time made good progress in understanding the need for evidence to enhance their understanding of what happened in the past. In a Year 10 GCSE English lesson, students made great strides in understanding the 'Sick Equation' poem by Brian Patten and were able to relate well to the themes of a difficult childhood. Progress and learning were less secure in a few lessons because the work was not matched well enough to their differing needs. Students have made some good as well as some excellent progress in the use of ICT as a research tool as well as to present their work across different subjects.

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Almost all students say that the school is a safe place to learn. In their questionnaire responses, a small minority of students were critical of behaviour in the school but in meetings with inspectors, students told how their behaviour has improved. One commented, 'I ain't perfect but I'm good now.' As they get older, they take more responsibility for their behaviour, rekindle their interest in learning and look forward to gaining accreditation before they leave. Students are confident that, should they raise any issues concerning safety, these will be dealt with quickly and sensitively by the school. Their personal development is underpinned by strong staff and student relationships. Instances of unacceptable behaviour resulting in fixed-term exclusions are declining. Students understand the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and enjoy the opportunities to take part in physical activity as well as commenting positively on the quality of the food provided at the school. Students have a say in the running of the school through the school council, present class assemblies at each site and support local, national and international charitable causes. Although the persistent absence of a very few continues to distort the overall figures, attendance is average overall and on an upward trend.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

**How effective is the provision?**

Excellent teamwork and collaboration between all adults in the classroom underpins the good quality teaching. All students are treated as individuals and this is effectively supported by strong behaviour management. This approach boosts students' self-esteem

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and results in positive behaviour and students who are involved in learning and keen, in many lessons, to do their best. In a food technology lesson, for example, students followed closely the well-established routines and sensibly used resources provided for bread-making. At the start, the teacher skilfully identified cross-curricular aspects of this work such as the knowledge students had gained in science about yeast. In most lessons seen, teachers are highly adept at ensuring students' individual needs were met fully. However, in some lessons, students who finish the work quickly are not given suitable extension tasks and recapping of learning is not as effective as it could be because of the rush to complete the behaviour points tally for each student.

Since the previous inspection, the school has ensured the breadth and balance of the curriculum meets the needs of all students and matches that taught in mainstream schools. This breadth and a good range of enrichment activities, within the school day and beyond, rekindles students' interest in learning. It also motivates them to deal with what are, for some students, the potentially less exciting parts of the curriculum. In addition, the curriculum contributes effectively to their academic progress and personal development, including their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It provides them with good opportunities to learn about the world of work, not only following GCSE courses, but also taking a broad range of other courses matched well to their learning needs. Excellent partnerships with local colleges and work experience providers add extensively to the breadth of opportunities for older students.

Students' health, safety and well-being are at the forefront of the school's ethos of care. All adults work hard to ensure this, helping each individual, including those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable, in very specific ways. A high level of staff supervision throughout the day, including at lesson change-over times, results in all being looked after in an exceptionally safe, healthy and caring environment. A carefully managed and executed programme of reviews is highly effective in supporting every student when they first join the school, throughout each year and when they leave. Careers guidance is highly effective and results in almost all students moving on to further education or training. In addition, the school tracks the progress of students for at least a year after leaving. Parents and carers too are given careful advice and support when needed.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

In spite of the uncertainty as a result of the ongoing local authority reorganisation proposals, the leadership team has remained positive and focused on continuing



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improvement at Ramsden Hall. Strengths identified at the previous inspection have been sustained and strategic planning has identified appropriate areas for further improvement. Notwithstanding this, planning for succession has been at the forefront of the school's thinking to ensure a smooth transition for leadership at the retirement of the current headteacher. The governing body has also been fully involved and effective in supporting this. There is a strong awareness of how to protect and keep students safe among governors and all staff at the school, particularly in ensuring the risks associated with developing technologies are taken fully into account, as well as high quality arrangements to ensure students are safe when learning off-site. The school is effective in ensuring all learners have equality of opportunity. It tackles any discrimination and achieves an effective ethos of inclusion with no underachievement of any particular groups. The school promotes community cohesion well through the curriculum but formal planning to support this, and monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, is not being used effectively in order to support future planning for this aspect of its work. Given the outcomes the school achieves, it is providing good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

**Boarding provision**

The quality of boarding is outstanding and the school meets nearly all of the key national minimum standards. Appropriate action has been taken to address the recommendations made at the last inspection, so that three recommendations are fully met and two are partially met. The minor shortfalls highlighted in this report do not impact on the care that students who board receive.

Students are provided with an outstanding level of care and their emotional and health needs are promoted very well. Files contain comprehensive health information. A child and adolescent mental health practitioner provides individual support to students and staff

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when needed. Staff have a clear understanding of medication systems and there are strong recording systems for the receipt and administration of medication. There is very good promotion of healthy eating. All food is home cooked on the premises and meals incorporate lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. There is a vegetarian option available every day and special diets are well catered for. Mealtimes are extremely well organised with clear routines to support the development of social skills.

Students' privacy is well respected and information is confidentially handled. All students surveyed agreed they have enough privacy. Complaint procedures are provided to students, parents and carers. There have been no complaints received by the school since the last inspection. Students identify a range of adults, in school and the boarding house, who they feel they can approach with any worries or concerns. Bullying is not tolerated and any incidents are taken seriously and closely monitored. Students are protected through effective systems to prevent absence without authority.

Students demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's expectations of behaviour and how to respond to one another. Staff build strong relationships with students. Praise is consistently used to encourage positive behaviour. Staff understand the antecedents to student's behaviour and help them to understand their behaviour so that they develop self-control. By these methods, they are guided to develop socially acceptable behaviour. An embedded and proactive approach to child protection is adopted by the school. Staff have an excellent understanding of child protection issues and are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities. Effective procedures keep students, staff and visitors safe from risk of fire and other hazards. Recruitment procedures are robust and all visitors are required to provide evidence of their identity and to sign a visitor's book. Students confirm that they feel safe at the school.

Excellent opportunities are made available to develop the life and social skills of students who board, thereby supporting their educational progress. Staff provide consistent bed-time routines and support with basic skills such as getting organised for school. This actively promotes students' engagement in education. The after-school activities programme and the established routines of the boarding houses provide a range of opportunities for students to develop life and social skills and increase their confidence, and self-esteem. Students report that they enjoy the evening activities on and off-site. Parents and carers agree that the boarding experience makes a positive contribution to their child's personal development.

New students are positively welcomed into the school and there are good systems to help them settle. Clear care plans are updated regularly and provide an accurate assessment of students' individual needs. Students are actively consulted and encouraged to express their views about their daily lives and contribute ideas to the development of the school community. Opportunities include annual reviews, residential and school council meetings, and daily contact with staff. Contact with parents and carers is well supported.

Boarding accommodation is provided on two sites and both have ongoing programmes of redecoration in place. Some redecoration has been completed since the previous inspection. However, there remain some areas that are 'tired' and some furnishings are worn. Staff work hard to provide a clean and welcoming environment and encourage students to personalise their bedrooms. Students say that they enjoy sharing with other boarders and are happy with the boarding accommodation.

Parents and carers are provided with information about how the school operates and the services provided. The staff team is extremely positive and strives to achieve the best for

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the students in their care. Staff receive relevant training, supervision and annual appraisals. They are highly committed to their roles and are very much aware of each student's uniqueness, including their individual strengths and weaknesses.

The leadership and management of the school is very strong and effective. The management team meets regularly, ensuring that matters affecting students' welfare are discussed and monitored. The governing body undertakes regular visits to the boarding provision. However, reports are not consistently completed as recommended by the national minimum standards. Overall, the outstanding boarding provision and good communication and cohesion amongst staff teams are extremely beneficial to the students.

### **National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care**

- Ensure the school provides adequate good-quality and well-maintained accommodation for boarding students which is consistent with their needs (NMS 24.1)
- Ensure that visits are conducted every half-term and a written report produced of the conduct of the school and action taken on concerns raised in such reports (NMS 33.2)

*These are the grades for the boarding provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the boarding provision</b>	<b>1</b>
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### **Views of parents and carers**

The proportion of questionnaires returned was below the national average for special schools. Almost all parents and carers who responded are happy with all aspects of the school's work. This inspection endorses these views. There were only three negative responses from three different questionnaires but no discernible pattern was evident.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ramsden Hall School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 13 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 93 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	5	38	8	62	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	7	54	6	46	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	9	69	4	31	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	5	38	8	62	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	46	7	54	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	38	7	54	1	8	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	4	31	8	62	0	0	1	8
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	54	6	46	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	62	4	31	1	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	7	54	6	46	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	62	5	38	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



14 July 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Ramsden Hall School, Billericay, CM11 1HN**

Not so long ago, three of us came to Ramsden Hall to see how well you are getting on in the school and the boarding houses. We also wanted to know whether we could suggest anything to make things even better for you. We really enjoyed meeting you in lessons and at lunchtimes and in the evenings. We also met with older groups of you at the school. We were particularly interested to hear how most of you think you have improved personally and how you now realise the importance of gaining accreditation before you leave. In addition, all you who completed the Ofsted questionnaire felt that the staff cared about you, were interested in your views and helped you improve your work. All of you felt the headteacher and senior staff did a good job. We agree with you!

We found that your school is good. It makes good provision for you and the boarding provision is outstanding. Here are some of the strengths we identified.

The school works really well with lots of other people, including your parents and carers, to support you.

The staff care for you exceptionally well, make sure you are safe and have your best interests at heart.

In lessons, teachers and other adults give you lots of help and support.

The curriculum and other activities provide many things to interest you.

The leadership team have plans to make things even better.

We found that the school could make some changes to improve your learning further and so we have asked the school leaders to make sure all teaching is good. We have also asked them to make sure you develop a good understanding of the lives of people who come from very different communities in this country and abroad.

You can help too by continuing to work hard; a few of you need to improve your attendance. I would like to wish you all the best for your future education.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden

Lead inspector

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