

Ramsden Hall School

Heath Road, Ramsden Heath, Billericay, CM11 1HN

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- School leaders, including governors, have failed to ensure that students across the two school sites have equal access to an acceptable standard of education.
- Leaders have not shared their vision and ambition about ways to improve students' behaviour and attitudes to learning across the school. As a result, students' behaviour and safety on the Billericay site are inadequate.
- Students' progress in writing and mathematics, at Billericay, is inadequate and too few Year 11 students are on track to do as well as they could in English.
- Systems for assessing and checking students' progress on the Billericay site are very recent. Teachers here do not have the information they need to help them plan effectively because they do not know what students have achieved, over time, in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teaching, on the Billericay site, is not effective, and lessons are interrupted by unacceptable behaviour. Marking does not make it clear to students how they could improve their work.
- Staffing turbulence and illness have resulted in inadequate leadership in key subjects, such as English and mathematics.

The school has the following strengths

- Students on the Langham site are making good progress because of effective teaching.
- Students' reading skills are improving throughout the school because of good teaching in individual and small group sessions.
- Strong leadership on the Langham site has secured improvements since the last inspection.
- The new head of education on the Billericay site has instigated changes that have begun to improve students' progress in mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons, all of which were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team at both sites. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to other lessons, looked at students’ work, observed an assembly and listened to students read.
- Meetings were held with staff, students, a local authority representative and members of the governing body, including the Chair and Vice Chair.
- Inspectors took account of the 22 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the school’s parent and student survey records, a written communication from a member of staff and 46 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including nationally published information on students’ achievement and the school’s own data, the school’s safeguarding policies, and records and documents relating to the management of teachers’ performance. Inspectors also took account of the self-evaluation document and improvement plans for the Ramsden Hall School (Langham site).

Inspection team

Justina Ilochi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Information about this school

- Ramsden Hall School is an 11–16 weekly residential special school for boys with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Thirty-eight students reside at the school for one to four nights a week.
- Ramsden Hall School is situated on a split site, 40 miles apart. One site is in Billericay and the other in Langham. Since the retirement of the previous executive headteacher just after the last inspection in 2011, the two sites of the school have operated independently but share a single governing body and a local authority adviser.
- The Chair of the Governing Body was appointed in September 2013. The governing body consists of two sub-committees one for each school site. These sub-committees report to the full governing body once every term. There are currently five vacant posts.
- About three fifths of students are on the Billericay site. This is led and managed by an acting principal and a vice principal/head of education. The rest of the students are on the Langham site run by an acting headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Since the previous inspection, the Billericay site has experienced a period of staffing turbulence with major changes in leadership and teaching staff. The vice principal/head of education was appointed in September 2013. Half the teaching and support staff are new. English and mathematics are currently being taught by non-specialist teachers because of the long-term absence of the English and mathematics teachers.
- Almost all students are of White British heritage.
- More than half the students are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority). This is almost three times the national average. The school has also received additional funding for Year 7 catch-up for this year.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs for behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.
- The school on the Billericay site makes use of a range of alternative provision. About half of the current students in Year 11 attend Billericay School, Circles Farm, Action Learning Alternative Education Centre and the CL Panel Craft (garage).

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good on the Billericay site by making sure that:
 - teachers plan interesting and challenging work
 - marking is used effectively to help students to improve their work
 - teachers set work at the right level, particularly for the more-able students.
- Improve students' behaviour and safety, particularly on the Billericay site by ensuring that:
 - fixed term exclusions and racist incidents decrease
 - attendance improves further throughout the school

- the behaviour policy is understood by all staff and students, applied consistently by staff and its effectiveness checked by leaders.

■ Improve leadership and management at all levels, especially on the Billericay site, including governance, by making sure that:

- accurate records which track students' past and current progress are used effectively by leaders to evaluate the school's work and by teachers in planning their lessons
- the roles of subject leaders are developed, particularly in English and mathematics, so that teaching and achievement improve
- governors and other leaders promote a shared understanding of good practice in teaching and learning across both sites, to secure equal access to a similarly good standard of education and support for all students.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should also be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Students on the Billericay site have not made enough progress in the last three years in reading, writing and mathematics. This is partly due to staffing problems but also because the leadership and management have not ensured that teachers on this site have access to reliable information about how well students are doing so they can set work at the right level.
- Information on the progress of students at Billericay is limited because this has not been collected and analysed systematically. The new head of education has recently introduced monitoring and assessment systems. Work is now underway to gather information so that appropriate targets are set for all year groups. However, it is clear that too many students do not make the progress expected and too few make better than expected progress, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- Too few of the more able Year 11 students, on the Billericay site, are on track to make expected progress. This is because the school has been unable to provide specialist English teaching recently due to staffing problems. The work set for these students does not always challenge them enough, so they do not do as well as they could.
- Langham site students, especially the more able, make good progress towards the challenging targets set in all subjects taught. Information about students' Key Stage 2 achievements is used effectively to set targets and to help students catch up on any lost ground. As a result, all students are on track to obtain A*-G grades at GCSE, with a few predicted to achieve A*-C grades in some subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- Students supported by the pupil premium are making similar progress when compared to other students in the school, including in English and mathematics. This additional funding has provided small group and individual work to improve reading. Some of these students are making faster progress in reading than their classmates. However, students' achievement is too low for all students at Billericay. Leaders have yet to evaluate the impact of the Year 7 catch-up funding.
- Work in students' books shows that Billericay students, in Year 11, are on track to attain more A*-G grades in GCSE mathematics than in English. This is a direct reflection of the better teaching now provided for these students in mathematics on this site.
- Students on the Langham site show high levels of concentration and they can listen to teachers for long periods. They make exceptional progress in their speaking, listening and communications skills.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Teaching is inadequate because its effectiveness is too variable between the two sites and consequently the progress made by Billericay students is too slow. Many teaching staff here are new and still developing confidence in managing the conduct of students with behavioural, emotional and social development needs. Overall, the management of the students' behaviour is weak.
- At Billericay, teaching does not maintain students' interest. Teaching is often uninspiring, so that some students stop listening, miss the focus of the lesson, become distracted and even walk out

of the classroom. In a Year 11 cooking lesson, the students had too little to do towards the end of the lesson and as a result, they wandered around aimlessly and wasted time. Teachers do not make effective use of the information available to help them challenge students, especially the more able.

- Marking does not help Billericay students understand the most important things they must do to improve their work and skills. For example, teachers' comments on the writing of some Year 11 students, potentially working towards a C grade in GCSE English, focused appropriately on full stops and capital letters, but not enough on exploring how the students' ideas could be developed more through the writing.
- On the Langham site, teachers know how well students are doing and what they need to do to improve. Tracking information is used effectively, so that students make consistently good progress in all subjects. Students' work in their books is marked frequently with comments that help students to achieve higher grades.
- The teaching of writing and mathematics is not improving quickly enough, especially for more-able students. Some teachers on the Billericay site joined the school recently and there is insufficient support, information and guidance available to them. School leaders are now working hard with the local authority to devise a plan to improve this.
- Reading is a top priority in the school. The teaching of reading is improving because of the sharp focus on closing the gaps between the progress of students eligible for additional funding, such as the pupil premium, and those who are not. Students who cannot read well are identified as soon as they join the school and placed on a reading support programme. As a result of the good one-to-one and group teaching, in Billericay's 'access unit' and through Langham's 'accelerated reading programme', there is now no gap in the reading age of eligible students when compared with other students in the school.
- On the Langham site, teaching in most subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics, is good. Effective teaching, teachers' consistent behaviour management and secure subject knowledge mean that most students make good progress and achieve well over time.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

- The behaviour of students is poor on the Billericay site. Students' poor behaviour interrupts the learning of others. During the inspection, the students' use of bad language was not always responded to appropriately by staff.
- Many Billericay students have positive attitudes to learning, much of the time. However, too many students become distracted and chat to one another, or disrupt the lesson through inappropriate behaviour.
- Assemblies are used at Billericay to help students reflect on their behaviour. Students understand the various types of bullying and know that bullying occurs in the school. Records confirm this to be the case, including some students' use of racist language. These incidents, and any other forms of discrimination, are largely dealt with appropriately by staff. Nevertheless, they still happen too often. Students and the majority of staff, who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, expressed concerns that the management of students' behaviour was not effective.
- During the inspection, behaviour around the Langham site and in lessons was largely good. Students here make good progress in managing their own behaviour. This is because they

understand the school's behaviour policy and staff manage students' behaviour very well. In addition, the site's good focus on the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness encourages personal responsibility and tolerance.

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is inadequate. Students, interviewed by inspectors, and staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, or communicated via other means, said students and staff do not always feel safe on the Billericay site.
- At Langham, the overwhelming views of parents, staff and students are that students are safe. For example, students are kept fully informed about potential risks in everyday life, including when using the internet and social media.
- The new behaviour code used on both sites has promoted a significant fall in exclusions this year. On the Langham site, exclusions have reduced to zero but on the Billericay site, fixed term exclusions are still too high. Attendance is improving steadily on both sites because of the more effective checking and following-up on students' absence. However, there are still too many students who do not attend school regularly.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leadership and management are inadequate because leaders have failed to ensure that all students on the school's roll have an acceptable standard of education. Achievement, teaching and the behaviour and safety of students are inadequate on the Billericay site.
- Although the quality of education has improved on the Langham site since the last inspection, this is not the case at Billericay. School leaders and the local authority have treated the sites as separate schools. This has slowed down cooperation and the sharing of good practice, leading to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, the leadership of subjects, the subjects on offer and the systems for checking the progress students make.
- Students in Year 11, for example, obtain a wide range of work-related qualifications such as the AQA award schemes, OCR Entry level certificates and GCSEs. However, those on the Billericay site spend less time studying for GCSE subjects and as a result, achieve fewer GCSEs than students on the Langham site, even though the students on each site have similar starting points on entry to the school.
- School leaders have developed good systems for self-evaluation on the Langham site. They are fully aware of the site's strengths and have very strong plans in place to improve further, including linking improvements to pay and progression for staff. They are continually seeking new ways to work effectively. For example, an online programme allows them to gather information electronically on all aspects of the performance of teachers. This has had a huge impact on improving the quality of teaching.
- The Billericay site has not evaluated its provision systematically and there have been no checks put in place by leaders and governors to ensure this happens.
- The Langham site has developed a strong team of knowledgeable leaders of subjects and all teachers are specialist subject teachers. Conversely, on the Billericay site new subject leaders for English and mathematics are yet to be trained effectively to take on this role.
- The school has sought the views of parents about a range of matters through a detailed questionnaire. The responses, like those of the parents who responded to Parent View, were

overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school's work.

- All staff on the Langham site are supportive of their leaders. They understand and value the school's ethos and say the school is managed well. A significant number of staff on the Billericay site do not agree with this view.
- Although school leaders aspire to create a culture which challenges all forms of discrimination and promotes equal opportunities for all students, they have not managed to achieve this. The school has not ensured that students across both sites, have access to a similar quality of education, or a learning environment where they feel safe.
- There are some signs of improvement. However, too much has been allowed to fall behind in the past. A new head of education at Billericay is working hard to put more effective systems in place. This includes improvements in how information is gathered about students' achievement on entry, processes for checking on students' progress in the school and to improve the performance management of staff.
- School leaders have kept a sharp focus on acquiring effective resources and improving staffing using the pupil premium funds. This has had a positive impact on reading for eligible students on both sites.
- The local authority is supporting the Billericay site to improve the quality of teaching and students' learning. It has provided less support for the provision on the Langham site because students' make better progress there.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has not ensured that both sites provide an acceptable standard of education where all students feel safe. This is because it does not have a clear overview of the effectiveness of each site and so has not promoted rapid improvements across the school as a whole.
- Governors have challenged the school, over the years, to raise achievement. This has resulted in an increase in the proportion of students leaving school, particularly from the Langham site, with five or more GCSE grades, including in English and mathematics.
- The governing body knows that teaching on the Billericay site is weaker than on the Langham site. However, governors have not challenged leaders to review performance effectively, or to develop improvement plans for all aspects of the site's work, including teaching. As a result, the management of the performance of staff is not yet well aligned to students' progress and to pay.
- The governing body understands the school's finances. The spending of the pupil premium funds is rigorously checked. However, governors have not checked how well the funding for Year 7 catch-up is used to raise the achievement of students across the school in reading, writing and mathematics.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its students' needs. This ensures that students are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its students' needs. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	115449
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	430738

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community Special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of students	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jan Cowen
Headteachers	Ms Yvonne Goouge; Ms Emma Paramor
Date of previous school inspection	12 July 2011
Telephone number	01206 271571
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