



Inspection report

Grey Court School

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 102922
LEA Richmond Upon Thames

Inspection number 274738
Inspection dates 25 and 26 April 2005
Reporting inspector Mrs C Bolton HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	Ham Street
School category	Community		Ham
Age range of pupils	11 to 16 years		Richmond Upon Thames
			Surrey
			TW10 7HN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 8948 1173
Number on roll	965	Fax number	020 8332 2428
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr G Bray
Date of previous inspection	September 2003	Headteacher	Ms R Jones

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 16 years	21 June 2005	274738

Introduction

When Grey Court School was inspected in September 2003, it was judged to require special measures because it was likely to fail to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on four occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in April 2005.

Description of the school

Grey Court is a comprehensive school of average size, with a roll of 965 pupils, aged between 11 and 16 years. Although the school is situated in an area of relative affluence, the pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs is close to the average but the proportion for whom English is an additional language is higher than in most schools. The school has experienced in recent years considerable difficulty in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified and experienced teachers. The situation is more stable now and at the time of this inspection, there were two vacant teaching posts. In 2003 the school was awarded specialist status in science, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) by the Department for Education and Skills.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

The headteacher and staff have worked hard to improve the teaching and learning, building upon the expertise of a secure nucleus of effective teachers and subject areas. Attainment in the GCSE examinations in 2004 was above the national average but the progress over time of some pupils is not rapid enough. However, teaching and leadership and management have improved since the last inspection and the school provides a satisfactory standard of education for its pupils. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and behave well in lessons. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and plans are well in hand to offer a more diverse and flexible programme in Key Stage 4 during the next academic year. There is a good range of extracurricular activities and of arrangements to encourage the pupils to become responsible members of the school and of the wider community.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of September 2003 required the school to make improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, in the provision for science and ICT, in the use of assessment and marking, in leadership and management, and in the level of challenge provided by the governing body. Good progress has been made in each of these areas. The school was also required to address deficiencies in the curriculum and in health, safety and statutory matters. Reasonable progress has been made in these last two areas. The requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship was not consistently met in the morning tutor periods inspected.

Capacity to improve

The school is well placed to make further improvements. The headteacher and senior managers have rightly made raising the quality of the teaching and learning a priority. There are systematic arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance and the school's managers have a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. The quality of subject leadership has improved significantly since the last inspection; although it is not yet consistently good, several departments are effectively led by subject leaders who provide strong models in their own classroom practice. The governing body includes among its membership a good range of expertise and experience. Governors work closely with the senior staff and have developed well their role in holding the school to account. The school has a difficult budgetary position but a three-year recovery plan has been agreed with the local education authority (LEA).

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities for the school's development plan are to:

- continue to improve the teaching and learning so that all of it is at least satisfactory and more of it is good or very good;
- ensure that all pupils, including those for whom English is an additional language and the higher attainers, make good progress over time;
- ensure that movement around the building is consistently orderly and that pupils treat all members of the school community with respect and consideration;
- improve punctuality to school and to lessons.

Achievement and standards

In the GCSE examinations in 2004, the pupils' attainment, in terms of their average points scores, was above the national average and well above the average for schools in similar socio-economic contexts. However, the overall performance of the girls was weaker in relation to national standards than that of the boys. Moreover, the progress made by this year group during Key Stage 4 was well below the benchmark for schools nationally in which the pupils had similar prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. The trend in the school's GCSE results over the last five years has been below the national trend.

The pupils' progress was at least satisfactory in just over nine out of ten lessons, and in just under six in ten it was good or very good. Most pupils wanted to do well and many had a good range of learning skills. In the best lessons, there were suitably demanding tasks and resources for the most able but the progress of these pupils was too slow in some classes because not enough was demanded of them. In lessons in which progress was unsatisfactory, a number of the pupils had negative attitudes to study, a legacy of weaknesses in the provision in the past. In some cases, the pupils were given too few opportunities to contribute to discussion or to develop their independent learning skills.

The progress of the pupils who have special educational needs was at least satisfactory overall in the majority of lessons. Learning support assistants usually made a valuable and well-informed contribution, but in some instances they were not effectively deployed and lesson planning did not always specify the role which they were expected to undertake. The progress of pupils for whom English is an additional language was uneven because the expertise of the staff in meeting their specific needs was not consistently secure. The school is aware that this aspect of provision is in need of more development and has formulated an action plan to raise the attainment of the pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Personal development

In nine out of ten lessons, the pupils' behaviour and personal development were at least satisfactory and in over six in ten they were good or very good. In most lessons, pupils were attentive and co-operative, sustaining their concentration well for reasonable periods. In a few lessons, some individuals were quietly disengaged or distracted from the learning. Overtly disruptive behaviour was seen in only one lesson during the inspection. The pupils were generally willing to contribute to discussion and to collaborate productively in small group activities. Provision for the pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory; provision for their social, moral and cultural development is good. The school offers its pupils a broad range of extracurricular opportunities, including sporting and charitable events and visits to places of interest, in this country and overseas. The pupils are given a broad experience of world faiths and of cultures other than their own. The school council, known as the Collegium, provides a good forum for discussion and for pupils to represent their views to the school's senior managers; the pupils' views have been consulted in the formulation of the new school improvement plan.

Relationships between adults and pupils were generally positive and mutually courteous. Most of the pupils who spoke to inspectors were of the opinion that relationships between pupils were also positive, that new pupils were welcomed and that the school took effective action to deal with bullying; a small group of pupils said that bullying was effectively dealt with if it was reported to the right members of staff, while another small group said that it was not always reported to adults. Most pupils moved sensibly around the buildings, showing consideration for their peers and for adults. Teachers supervised corridors carefully at the changes of lessons and there was a strong senior staff presence around the site. There were, however, some instances of boisterous behaviour on corridors and in the outside areas of the school. Attendance for the school year to date is broadly in line with national figures. The pupils' punctuality to school and to lessons is variable; senior staff are on duty at the school gates at the start of the day to discourage lateness, but recognise that there is room for further improvement in this aspect of the pupils' personal development.

Quality of provision

In nine out of ten lessons, the teaching was at least satisfactory and in over half, it was good or very good. The quality of lesson planning was generally at least satisfactory and often good; learning objectives were clear and focused and the teachers made skilful use of the interactive whiteboards with which the school is well resourced. Most teachers managed their classes well and applied the school's behaviour policy consistently. There were numerous examples of effective questioning to elicit extended contributions from the pupils and to assess their understanding as the learning progressed. In the best lessons, discussion was well managed to develop the pupils' knowledge and thinking skills and to encourage them to become more confident speakers, notably in modern foreign languages lessons.

Where teaching was unsatisfactory, the needs of pupils of differing levels of attainment were not fully met and this was particularly an issue for the most able. While classroom management was usually at least satisfactory, in a few lessons the pupils were allowed to be disengaged and to take part in low level but distracting misbehaviour. In some instances, the teachers talked for too much of the time and allowed the less confident individuals to opt out of oral work. In a number of lessons, too little use was made of strategies to assess the pupils' learning in order to adapt the teaching to meet their needs. There were some good examples of marking, for example in mathematics, modern foreign languages and English, but the school recognises that across the school the quality of marking is uneven and a policy review is planned for the summer term.

Following a comprehensive review of the Key Stage 4 curriculum the timetable has been innovatively revised for September 2005, when three distinct programmes will be offered to meet the pupils' differing needs and career aspirations. Changes have also been made to the Key Stage 3 timetable to allow heads of faculty more autonomy in grouping pupils. At Key Stage 4 next year, just over half of the pupils will follow the more academic programme; about a third will follow the applied pathway, which includes college courses, and just under a tenth will follow the vocational and more personalised programme. The pupils have been guided in their choice of programmes by the staff, drawing on the school's extensive database and on their knowledge of individuals; it is a positive reflection on this knowledge that that only six pupils have asked to change to another programme, all of them in order to study engineering.

The school has established a comprehensive database of the pupils' test and examination results, as well as target grades. Information about progress towards the targets is shared with the pupils and their parents or carers at regular intervals. Most pupils spoken to during the inspection were aware of their targets although they were not all as clear about the actions they needed to take in order to reach them. The school is using the assessment data to inform a variety of strategies in Year 11 which are designed to raise attainment. A programme of mentoring for pupils is provided both by external consultants and by school staff, and additional classes are running before and after school. Further intervention strategies are in place to improve achievement in Years 9 and 10.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior management team provide unambiguous and consistent leadership and they have a realistic vision for the future of the school. They work well together as a team and they have a very visible presence around the site. They give staff and the pupils a clear sense of direction, with a strong focus on raising achievement. Their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood.

The school evaluates its work and the impact that new strategies are having. This is based not only on the results of the monitoring carried out by the leadership team but also on evaluations completed in each subject area. The senior managers have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Staff training is a high priority and is helping to ensure improvements in the quality of teaching. A particular focus has been on training in lesson observation for middle managers and, as a result, many are setting clearer objectives for their teams and are monitoring more effectively. Performance management is now embedded in the work of the school.

Although staff recruitment continues to be difficult, substantive heads of mathematics and ICT are now in post and this is beginning to have a positive impact upon work in these subjects. Supply teachers are monitored regularly to ensure that an acceptable quality of learning is maintained. The school provides equality of opportunity and is committed to supporting all pupils; an inclusion manager is due to begin work shortly.

The school is in the process of developing a new improvement plan and has involved staff, governors, parents and pupils in the consultation. Members of the governing body bring a broad and relevant range of expertise to their work, and have developed well their role in monitoring the work of the school and holding its managers to account. A recovery plan to eliminate the budget deficit is in place and the school is monitoring its finances carefully. The school is working hard to improve the accommodation and further alterations are planned for this summer. The LEA has provided a good level of advice and guidance across a broad range of the school's work and this support has been valued by the staff.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

Grey Court School was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in September and October 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was likely to fail to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in February, May and October 2004 and in January 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the areas for improvement in the inspection report of September 2003.

In April 2005, three HMI and an Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Forty lessons or part lessons, six registration periods and an assembly were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior managers, middle managers, the chair of the governing body and the chair of the governance committee, members of the school council, a representative of the LEA and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and areas for improvement in the inspection report of September 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those areas for improvement.

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