



Little Heath School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110063
LEA West Berkshire LEA
Inspection number 278362
Inspection dates 16 November 2005 to 17 November 2005
Reporting inspector Paul Armitage HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Little Heath Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Tilehurst
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		Reading RG31 5TY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01189427337
Number on roll	1640	Fax number	01189421933
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs J Charmak
Date of previous inspection	13 March 2000	Headteacher	Mr M Wheale

Age group 11 to 19	Inspection dates 16 November 2005 - 17 November 2005	Inspection number 278362
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Little Heath is a popular comprehensive school on the outskirts of Reading. The school is much bigger than other secondary schools with over 1,600 students, of whom over 280 are in the sixth form. The school's catchment is very varied and some students come from homes experiencing economic and social hardship. Though there is considerable variation between students, their overall standard on entry to the school is average. The number of students with special educational needs is below average. 4 per cent of students do not have English as their first language. The school is specialist in science and mathematics.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

In its self-evaluation, the school judges itself to be good overall. Inspectors think it is better than this and have judged it to be outstanding. Standards are high and most students make excellent progress, especially in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Students' personal development is excellent. It is impressive to see the way they develop as well rounded individuals as they progress through the school. Students' attitudes are generally very good; they work hard and are keen to do well. A key reason for this success is the way that everyone involved in the school including the students, headteacher, governors, managers at all levels, teachers, support staff, and parents are all working to the same aim of doing as well as they can. The headteacher, senior managers and staff know very well how the school is doing and what can be achieved in the future so that it has the capacity to maintain its excellent quality and improve still further. The school offers excellent value for money. Inspectors have no real concerns to put to management as improvement points but have made three suggestions linked to developing students' confidence still further; rationalising the personal, social, health, social education (PSHE) and citizenship programmes; and keeping the curriculum sensitive to the needs of the local community.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is excellent. Student numbers have increased significantly in recent years reflecting the public's acknowledgement of its success. Examination results remain consistently above average. Students make excellent progress. Teaching is excellent although there is scope to give students more responsibility for their own learning. There is a good range of courses including an increasing number of popular vocational opportunities. The school monitors local needs well to ensure that it is meeting demand. Students are well motivated and drop out rates are low. Leadership and management are highly effective. Standards are monitored closely and effective action is taken to identify areas for improvement and to promote best practice.

What the school should do to improve further

* Continue to explore ways of developing students' confidence in presenting themselves and their work through independent learning and greater participation in the running of the school.* Reconsider existing provision in personal, social, health, social and citizenship education to ensure that the programme as a whole is clear, coherent and conforms with National Curriculum and other requirements.* Continue to monitor the needs of students in school and the locality to ensure that the curriculum meets their needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are above average and in 2004, GCSE results were outstanding. In most subjects, the percentage of students achieving A* to C grades was significantly higher than the national average. Taking all subjects as a whole, standards have risen steadily over the past few years at a level above the national average. There are variations in standards between subjects and between years but where this occurs the school acts quickly to identify issues and address them. From Year 7 to Year 9 students make very good progress in all subjects and in Years 10 and 11, their progress is even better. This impressive achievement has been consistent in recent years and in 2004, large numbers of students who entered the school in Year 7 with moderate standards attained high GCSE grades - especially in English and science. In Key Stage 3 particularly, there has been a difference in girls' and boys' performance with girls doing better than boys. However, due to the school's positive action, there has been a strong improvement in boys' standards, particularly in English. Students with special educational needs in both Key Stages 3 and 4 also make excellent progress. In the sixth form, examination results remain consistently above average. The progress made by students of all abilities is outstanding, in particular for those who begin their courses with below average GCSE results. Students benefit from the high levels of support and guidance provided. The school's highly effective systems for monitoring students' performance, reviewing these results with students and establishing challenging but reachable targets have contributed to this success.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' spiritual development is very good. As they get older their character and personality develop well. They are developing confidence as well as sensitivity to the world around them. The school rightly recognises the need to develop students' confidence further; for example, by increasing their role in management of the school and by improving their ability to communicate better in their speaking, writing and presentation of work. Students' moral development is very good and their social development is excellent. They often hold firm moral standpoints and they work very well together; for example in class and in looking after younger students. There is some bullying but students say that they know what to do if they experience it and that staff never ignore it. The school has an effective negotiating system for dealing with the few cases of persistent bad behaviour. Black students asked specifically about racism said this was not something they had experienced. Students' cultural development including their knowledge and understanding of the various cultures found in Britain is very good. They get much from the formal curriculum and from the rich range of extra-curricular activities including those in dance, drama, music and art and a wide range of visits. This year's Equal Opportunities Week focussed on racism. Students' attitudes to school are excellent; attendance rates are high. Students value

the formal curriculum, the flexible option choice system, the numerous twilight sessions, the extra-curricular activities, and above all, the attitude of the teachers. One student interviewed commented that 'teachers care; they really do want to help you to do well.' In the sixth form, students are well motivated and have responsible attitudes to their work. Drop out rates from courses are low. Students are very well aware of safe practices and healthy lifestyles. There is effective sex and relationship education and drug education. Students interviewed were well aware of what constitutes a balanced diet. There is good take up of opportunities for sport. Students make a good contribution to the community outside school - for example, through their participation in work experience, community service in the sixth form, local sports teams and other clubs, elements in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, and various charity events. Students are very well aware that they are preparing for working life and the ability to support their dependents. Most have good aspirations for their future and are very clear on how the school is helping them achieve these. The school has had a good deal of success in terms of the numbers of students going on to further and higher education. The needs of students with special educational needs are very well met. There is an excellent Learning Development Unit where students with a range of needs receive close support from the unit staff and from their own subject teachers who work closely with the unit. Students also get good support in class through a good number of teaching assistants who are well deployed and ably guided by a senior assistant.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

There is much excellent teaching and learning. In general, lessons are well- designed to meet the needs of different students and this enables higher and lower attaining students to achieve well. A good example is in Years 7 and 8 where class sizes are varied to enable more intensive support for some learners. Teachers routinely make the objectives of lessons clear, set a good pace and employ a range of methods and activities to keep students focussed. They have very good subject knowledge, a passion for their subjects and a real desire for students to do well. This provides 'spark' to the lessons and is a key reason why students are interested and why they do well. Teachers make good use of resources such as interactive whiteboards to add variety to the learning. Students are keen to learn and apply themselves very well. Helped by the school's very good assessment practices, students know how they are doing and how to improve. They like learning best when they are actively engaged, finding things out and making their own judgements. The school is currently exploring how more could be done to encourage this independent learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is very good. It supports students' engagement and enjoyment in learning. As a result, they make excellent progress. Some outstanding features are: * timetabling in Key Stage 4 that enables students to study subjects which interest them and has a positive impact on achievement; * the way in which the curriculum prepares students for work; * the very good range of extra-curricular activities; * curriculum-linked revision sessions which help students to prepare and achieve well in examinations; * the school's successful focus on developing cross-curricular work to develop students' literacy and ICT skills. The school is constantly reviewing its curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of students in the locality. It is rightly considering whether to expand the range of vocational courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The school has an effective PSHE programme but there is scope to improve coordination of the various parts and the school has not yet developed its formal citizenship curriculum to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Students complain about the absence of drama in Years 8 and 9. The school's specialist science status has enhanced many areas of work throughout the school. Key influences include the introduction of different teaching styles to suit different groups of students and the use of ICT throughout the school. Work with feeder primary schools has helped Year 6 students to make a successful transition into Year 7 and their teachers to adjust the curriculum to meet students' needs. The sixth form curriculum is good and has been developed in recent years by the introduction of a number of vocational subjects. These are increasingly popular with students. The school recognises that there could be further development, particularly with courses to match boys' interests better and for those not yet ready to begin advanced level work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, advice, guidance and other support given by the school is exemplary. As has already been indicated, the school monitors students' needs very carefully and uses this information to good effect to influence such things as students' targets, teaching strategies and careers guidance. The role of the tutor on which the school has placed much recent emphasis is critical in this and arrangements are working very well. Information is shared with students who have a very good idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do better. Students are actively engaged in their own assessment though this is an area that will stand further development. Students with personal or other needs are very well supported by staff including tutors and members of the Learning Development Team. Teaching Assistants are really helpful as are other members of staff such as those in reception, catering and school maintenance who listen and talk to students as people. There is very good guidance for students and parents on all matters to do with school. Parents talk openly about the good communications. There is helpful information on options in both Year 9 and 11 and in relation to career progression after school. Child protection procedures are in place and work effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The head teacher provides outstanding leadership in a rigorous, inspiring but unassuming way. He is very effectively supported by an imaginative and dynamic senior leadership team. Together they set a clear direction for the school. They accurately identify strengths and are rigorous in their commitment to raise standards still further by identifying relative weaknesses. Staff and students work in an environment where enthusiasm and innovation are valued and encouraged. The school self-evaluates very well at all levels. Attainment data and other evidence linked to all aspects of the school's performance are routinely analysed in order to set challenging targets, both for the school and for individual students. The quality of teaching and learning is regularly and effectively reviewed as is the curriculum for its effectiveness. Management is ready to introduce new courses when appropriate. It consults well and the views of students and parents are regularly sought on a range of issues. It has begun to develop the tutor/School Council system more effectively by ensuring that students discuss more significant issues than previously. Students are involved in the appointment of staff. Middle managers have clearly defined roles and are held to account. There is evidence of strong leadership in individual subjects and elsewhere, for example, in the Learning Development Unit. Highly committed heads of year ensure that students receive high quality care, guidance and support, both in their learning and in their personal development. In the sixth form strong leadership has brought about high standards as well as the enrichment of the curriculum to make provision for students who want to follow vocational courses. As a consequence more students than ever are remaining at the school for their sixth form studies. The school is justifiably proud of its programme of support for newly qualified and trainee teachers and has become a focus for expertise and good practice in this field, as well as in science. The governing body successfully fulfils its role by closely monitoring the work of the school and supporting senior managers. Governors carefully evaluate planned initiatives and their outcomes. They are acutely aware of the need to focus on standards. Taking all factors into account, managers have the capacity to ensure that the school maintains its high quality and improves where necessary.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

You know that we have recently inspected your school. We were pleased to talk with many of you. I would like to thank everyone for the help they gave us. I am writing to you now to summarise our main findings

We have given your school our top grade - grade 1. We have lots of reasons for saying that your school is outstanding. Firstly, the standards that you achieve in your work are high. Secondly, when we measure your standards on entry to the school in Year 7 and compare them with your results when you leave, we can see that you make excellent progress, especially in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Thirdly, your personal development is excellent. It is impressive to see the way you develop as people as you progress through the school. Your attitudes are very good. You are focussed on doing well so that you come across as being very professional. A key reason for this success is the way that everyone involved in the school including you, your headteacher, governors, teachers, support staff, and parents are working as well as they can to achieve high standards. In particular, your headteacher, senior managers and staff know very well how the school is doing and how high standards can be maintained and even improved in the future.

When we visit schools, we are required to identify some key areas where schools need to improve. In the case of your school, we have no major concerns but in the report, we have agreed with the suggestion of your School Council that there should be more opportunities for students to be actively involved in how they learn and in advising on issues which are significant for the school. We think this will help learning and also help you present yourselves and your written and oral work even more confidently than you do now. The school has already started this so we have just asked teachers to consider doing more. We also think you would benefit from a more integrated PSHE and citizenship programme. We have also encouraged teachers to carry on keeping an eye on what local young people want to study and change the curriculum when necessary. Little Heath is doing very well. Students, the headteacher and others have worked hard to achieve this. There are good plans for the future. The key thing now is for you to continue to work with teachers to get all you can from the many opportunities available in the school. I hope this short summary has been helpful to you. You can see the full report on Ofsted's website at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Just type in Little Heath in the search window and click this year's report. My very best wishes for the future.