



The Appleton School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115334
Local Authority ESSEX
Inspection number 279576
Inspection dates 26–27 September 2006
Reporting inspector Ian Seath HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Croft Road
School category	Foundation		Benfleet
Age range of pupils	11–16		Essex SS7 5RN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01268 794215
Number on roll (school)	1183	Fax number	01268 759981
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr S Dilworth
		Headteacher	Mrs K Kerridge
Date of previous school inspection	25 September 2000		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	26–27 September 2006	279576

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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

The Appleton school is a popular mixed comprehensive school in Benfleet, Essex. It has specialist business and enterprise status. At the time of inspection it had around 1,180 students aged 11–16. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students for whom English is not their first language is very low at 1%. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is very low. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is significantly below the national average, as is the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Appleton School is a good and improving school which has the capacity to become outstanding. It is held in high regard by students, parents, teachers and the local community. It provides a welcoming, safe and pleasant environment for learning. In the past, achievements and standards have been above those of comparable schools at Key Stage 4, and broadly in line at Key Stage 3. The last two years have shown considerable improvements and achievement and standards are now good overall. Though it is too early to be sure that these improvements will be sustained, students' progress has improved markedly. Notably, the inclusive and supportive nature of the school ensures that all students succeed. These changes are due to a number of factors. Leadership and management are good. Management action and changes have resulted in clearer target setting and monitoring both for students and staff. Inspectors judged that both curriculum and support and guidance are outstanding. This means that the needs of all students are catered for very well. Students are guided onto the right courses for them, so they succeed. For example, those who will benefit from more vocational options can do so. The standard of academic support is also high. Revision and coursework sessions outside of school hours help students to succeed. In general, standards are improving and staff are clear about how they will ensure that the process continues. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades A and A* was low in English, Art and Drama in 2005, though there were improvements in 2006. The majority of teaching is good and some is outstanding, though inspectors observed a small proportion of inadequate lessons. In those successful lessons observed, students were interested and contributed well, so they learned effectively. In the unsuccessful lessons observed they were bored, behaviour declined and learning was poor. Throughout the school, teaching and learning are aided by good resources. Students, and the local community, benefit from an outstanding range of extra-curricular sports and events. Team sports are well attended and a wide variety of visits enrich students' life at the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to increase the proportion of students achieving high grade A and A* passes, in GCSE subjects.
- Work to eliminate the small amount of inadequate teaching and learning
- Ensure that variations in GCSE pass rates between subjects are minimised

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good and the school has made many recent changes to improve achievement further. Results for 2006 indicate that the school has again improved on the already good achievements of 2005. When students enter the school in Year 7, their prior attainment is around the national average, though fewer of them have achieved the highest attainment levels. At Key Stage 3, progress was below the national average in 2005 in English and mathematics, though it was above in science.

In 2006 however, progress improved markedly both overall and in all core subjects, particularly English, so that standards by Year 9 were above average. As students move through the school their progress improves so that by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4 they are achieving significantly better than expected. In 2005 the proportion of students who achieve five or more grades A* to C at GCSE increased to around 5% higher than the national average for similar schools and remained similar in 2006. However, the difference was less marked when grades for English and mathematics were included. Pass rates for vocational courses are high, particularly in business. Some students are able to enter GCSE examinations a year early and they succeed well. In art, English and drama, the proportion of students who gained the highest GCSE grades A and A* was low in 2005. By contrast, students taking science achieved a high proportion of high grades. The overall proportion of students gaining the highest GCSE grades improved in 2006. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The proportion of students who achieve five or more GCSE grades A to G has improved steadily in recent years and is now significantly above the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. There has been a significant improvement in the spiritual and cultural development of students since the last inspection. Students have a good understanding of different cultures and faiths. They work well with each other and enjoy their education. This is demonstrated by their good achievement, although the school recognises the need to improve the proportion of students who achieve the highest grades. Participation in extra-curricular activities is good, with a wide range of clubs and pursuits on offer. Behaviour in and around the school is good. The school provides a safe environment. The implementation of bullying and racist policies has been very effective. There is a good emphasis on following a healthy lifestyle and students have good opportunities to participate in sport. Students learn about healthy foods and are able to influence the food available in the school canteen. Students feel safe in the school and make good contributions to their community. They participate in the school council and the peer counselling service. Students' views are sought and acted upon. They raise money for charities and make good contributions to the activities of local employers and public services. The preparation for students' future economic well-being is outstanding and a major strength of the school. They benefit from the business and enterprise specialist status and all students undertake three weeks of work experience and take part in industry days. The school has a distinctive business and enterprise ethos. All students study business and enterprise and the majority take a vocational course.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers plan lessons well. In the most effective lessons challenging and varied activities enable learners to make good progress. The school has an accurate understanding of its own teaching and learning and there are now detailed reviews across all subject areas to help improve teaching so that learners achieve as much as possible. Inspectors agreed with the school that many lessons are good and a few are outstanding, however a small amount of inadequate teaching was observed in which learning was poor. The school has responded effectively to staffing difficulties. Students generally enjoy learning and take pride in their work, presenting it carefully. They work productively in groups, as in a Year 11 economics lesson where students enthusiastically discussed ideas for cutting NHS costs. Good summary sessions help students consolidate learning. Most teachers use resources such as ICT effectively to make activities interesting, and support individuals well. They generally manage behaviour well, but in weaker lessons students get bored and lose concentration because tasks are not suitable. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported by teachers and learning support staff and make good progress. Gifted and talented students are increasingly being given more challenging tasks. Assessment and monitoring of learners' progress are good, particularly in Years 9, 10 and 11. Teachers use a well-thought out and clear system of setting targets for students and encourage learners to assess themselves. Their work is marked in a constructive and helpful way so that most are aware of the levels at which they are working and the steps which are necessary to improve. Spellings are usually corrected. New teachers are very well supported. Teachers are positive about the school and enjoy working there.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school's curriculum is outstanding. This is because it caters for the needs of all students very effectively. For example, the school has a 'pathways' system of new class groupings, strong business and enterprise elements, and excellent extra-curricular activities. In Year 7, a quarter of students are now in classes to help them take GCSE three years earlier in some subjects such as languages and ICT, and this arrangement is helping all students achieve more. In Years 10 and 11, the increasingly diverse range of academic and vocational courses meets students' needs. The school's specialist status in business and enterprise and support given by national and local firms help enrich teaching and learning. Sponsorship from business partners supports industry days in each year, a school bank and students' participation in trade fairs and successful Young Enterprise companies. All Year 10 students go on three-week work placements; opportunities to study vocational and ICT courses in Years 10 and 11 have been significantly extended since the last inspection. New NVQ courses have recently begun in construction and hairdressing and there is an effective ASDAN basic skills option

for lower attaining students. Careers guidance, helped by the Connexions service, is very good. The curriculum is enriched through a wide range of clubs including sports, music, dramatic productions, mathematics clubs and charity fund-raising. Provision for citizenship education is good; students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions both within subjects and through the excellent School Council. The school provides a wide portfolio of short courses for the local community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding level of care, guidance and support for its pupils. The school takes bullying and racist behaviour very seriously and the small numbers of incidents are dealt with effectively. Policies on bullying and racism are well supported by pupil volunteers who are trained as peer listeners. The school's new code of conduct is understood well by pupils and there is a successful reintegration programme for students who need to modify their behaviour. Statutory requirements for child protection are met and arrangements for training staff (including non-teaching staff) are rigorous. Procedures are in place to ensure that adults in school are police checked although this does not yet extend to school governors. The school operates a very successful Student Support and Guidance Group (SSG) who work together effectively to ensure that support for vulnerable pupils is coordinated and followed through rigorously. Links with primary schools are strong, and good transition arrangements ensure that they settle in well. Pupils also receive very good support in making decisions about educational and vocational options at the ages of 14 and 16 from the school and from trained Community Mentors. The number of pupils taking up further education, training or employment is very high. The school gives good academic guidance, so achievements are good and improving. The use of target setting is well developed. Students know their current level of attainment and their target. They receive feedback on their work and regular review meetings with their form tutors allow them to reflect on their progress and plan for their future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, governors and senior management team provide purposeful leadership and direction. Managers have a clear vision of how they wish the school to develop, and staff are effectively involved in planning to bring it about. The recent rise in standards is a result of the leadership team's strategies. These include ensuring that all students are challenged well with appropriate targets. In addition, the outstanding curriculum ensures that the needs of all students are catered for. Communications are good, and staff feel well supported. Students' test and examination results are used effectively to identify areas where teaching and learning can be further improved. Professional development of staff is effectively linked to this analysis. Subject departments also use this information, in conjunction with their own rigorous self-assessment, to develop action plans to raise

attainment. Recently implemented strategies to improve achievements are showing early signs of success and improvements were evident in the 2006 results. The school is clear about the need to continue the improvement process, and has the capacity to become outstanding. The chair of governors has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the school. School and governors recognise the need for governors to challenge the school further, and the role of the governing body is being strengthened by regular training of its members. Teachers are suitably qualified and experienced. Resources are generally good and are used well, though some of the curriculum is delivered in old huts. The school has done much to address the issues identified by the previous inspection, although the appointment of new staff remains a concern in spite of a determined effort to overcome recruitment difficulties. Because of improving achievements and the breadth of the curriculum, inspectors judge value for money to be good.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 September 2006 Dear Students The Appleton School, Croft Road, Benfleet, Essex, SS7 5RN

Earlier this week I visited your school with four other inspectors. We talked with many of you and with your teachers, sat in on many lessons, and looked at much of your work. We also received a large number of completed forms from your parents. Throughout this process you were helpful and courteous and I would like to thank you for that. Your behaviour was good, and you moved around the school and between lessons in a calm and unhurried way. Your school is a good school, and you and most of your parents are justifiably proud of it. You told us that you feel safe at school, and that the school gives you very good support and advice. You also told us that the amount of bullying was very low. You can help keep it this way by talking with somebody if you are affected. Your school does many things very well. It offers you lots of different ways to learn and achieve, and a very good choice of sports and out of school activities and study help. One of the things the school is working on is to increase the number of students who get the highest grades in their GCSEs and other courses. You can help with this by taking advantage of the excellent support which the school provides. The school is improving quickly, but it needs your help to continue the process and become outstanding. Your school has many strengths, but the biggest one is you. If you work hard at your studies there is a very good chance that you will succeed well and move onward, well prepared for later life. Thank you once again, and I wish you all well. Ian Seath HMI Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools Lead Inspector