



Rickmansworth School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117572
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280121
Inspection dates 15 November 2005 to 16 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mr. George Derby LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Scots Hill
School category	Foundation		WD3 3AQ
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01923773296
Number on roll	1224	Fax number	01923897314
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Dr. Edgar Anderson
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Dr. Stephen Burton

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	15 November 2005 - 16 November 2005	280121

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Rickmansworth is a larger than average sized school. It is extremely popular with parents and there are not enough places for all those who want their children to attend. The sixth form is large and part of the programme for pupils is jointly organised with two other schools. About a third of the pupils are selected on the basis on their academic or musical ability. Pupils enter the school with attainment which is well above average. The conditions and backgrounds from which they come are generally very favourable. The number of boys and girls is similar and about 13% of pupils come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The largest group are from Indian heritage and only one pupil is learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is very low. There is a much lower than average number of pupils with learning difficulties. The school became an arts college in 2003. A few departments have experienced staffing difficulties over the past few years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which has many outstanding features. Its view of itself is not entirely accurate as it judges itself slightly better than this in some respects. Value for money is good. It takes good care of its pupils. It helps them to develop well into mature young adults, prepared effectively for future study or employment. Sixth form students act as excellent role models for younger pupils, often helping them in lessons. Pupils behave exceptionally well, thoroughly enjoy school, and their attendance is excellent. The standards pupils attain in the main school are excellent and they are good in the sixth form. In many of the 'arts' subjects, such as art, photography, dance, drama and music, pupils' attainment is exceptional. This is because of the high commitment of staff, the excellent programmes of work and the outstanding teaching. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and from different ethnic backgrounds, achieve well from their starting points. This is due to effective teaching which is occasionally exceptional. However, the school does not always use the information it gains from its monitoring to share best practice across the school. The curriculum is extremely broad and the number of activities outside lessons is outstanding. Many aspects of the curriculum are excellent. However, it cannot be judged better than satisfactory; the school does not comply with requirements to ensure that all pupils are fully taught information and communication technology (ICT) in Key Stage 4 and religious education in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The school is led and managed well. The recent development in relation to the school's arts status has been excellent. This demonstrates the senior leadership team's strong capability to effect improvement. However, progress since the last inspection is satisfactory overall. Although the school generally responds well to variation across subjects, action to ensure that Year 8 and 9 pupils have a full programme of work in ICT has not been swift enough.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is good and this judgement is in line with the school's own view. Students praise the high expectations, support and teaching of staff which enable them to attain good standards. However, even though there is a large selection to choose from, a few feel that the choice of subjects is too narrow. The links with other sixth forms and the planned increase in vocational opportunities is likely to give students even more variety. The students are given full guidance about future options, especially in their preparation for university. Numerous enrichment and leadership opportunities significantly extend their personal development ensuring they are very well prepared for life after school. The sixth form is well led and managed. The very regular and detailed monitoring of the progress of all students and the staff's response to adapting programmes and support has a positive effect on achievement and standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide a full programme of work in ICT in Years 8 and 9 and meet statutory requirements by providing religious education to all pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, and ICT for all pupils in Key Stage 4. - Continue to improve monitoring of teaching and learning and use the information from this to improve their quality and ensure consistent standards across the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good overall and pupils make good progress across the school. This progress is more rapid in the core subjects at Key Stage 3. Although there is some variation in pupils' progress in subjects, standards are exceptional at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and have been this way for many years. The school achieves the challenging targets it sets itself. Pupils make good progress in mathematics and standards are exceptionally and consistently high by Year 11. A significant proportion of the pupils reach the top grades in tests and examinations. Progress and the pupils' standards in English have fluctuated over the last two years, partially due to staffing difficulties. However, pupils' progress is good and the most recent GCSE results show an improvement and are outstanding. The Year 9 tests results were a little lower than in previous years but still very high. Pupils have performed less well in science but standards have still been very high. The pupils' progress is only satisfactory across the school. There have been relatively few of the highest GCSE grades in science in the last two years compared with the school average. By contrast, the pupils' standards in art, dance, history, photography, religious education and drama have been outstanding. Achievement in the sixth form has improved in recent years. Girls do better than boys at A Level. Students make good progress from their GCSE starting points and standards are above average overall. Subject performance varies. Outstanding results have been consistently attained in art, drama and photography in the last few years. Against this, performance in history, geography, modern foreign languages and economics have lagged behind other subjects. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs make similar progress overall to others in their classes because of the strong support they receive. There is no significant difference in the progress of pupils from different ethnic groups. Pupils learning English as an additional language also make similar progress to most other pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good and their behaviour and attendance are outstanding. They enjoy school, which is a harmonious and civilised environment. They feel they are respected and almost invariably respect each other and their surroundings. They understand the school's codes of conduct and the necessity of taking precautions to work safely. Bullying is not a problem. Pupils say that if an incident occurs they know what to do, and that the school deals effectively

with any such incidents. Pupils respond well to opportunities to deepen their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Assemblies and lessons in many subjects provide opportunities to reflect and consider issues in wider contexts. Regularly, groups benefit from visits further afield. When given responsibilities, pupils fulfil them well and contribute to the school community, for example, reception duties by Year 8 pupils and the sixth form pupils help those with special educational needs. Pupils have good awareness about developing a healthy lifestyle, and healthy choices in the cafeteria are popular. A programme of work-related learning assists pupils effectively in developing skills which contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils are well motivated and learn effectively in response to good teaching. Overall, they develop good levels of knowledge, skill and understanding because teachers draw effectively on their own good subject knowledge. Relationships are very good. The quality of teaching varies across the school. The monitoring of teaching has not always been consistent, but recent changes are improving the way the school checks on the quality of teaching. Very high expectations and inspirational teaching in the arts subjects rapidly accelerate achievement, as observed in art, drama and photography. On the whole, teachers' expectations are reasonably high. However, in some classes their plans do not take enough account of the range of levels at which pupils are working, so that pupils do not always understand what to do next. Pupils say they know how well they are doing but, occasionally, marking does not always include comments to help them to improve and assessment practice is variable. The school's plan to make learning objectives clear in lessons and to monitor progress relative to these is being implemented steadily. When pupils understand what is expected of them they respond enthusiastically. Lessons include a good range of activities, but the use of homework is uneven and sometimes little is set. In lessons, pupils are very willing to think for themselves, to work independently and in small groups. They research well, making effective use of ICT, and present their findings very capably. Examples of imaginative teaching, such as drama techniques in citizenship and visitors with specialist knowledge in sixth form lessons, stimulate very good learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

This is satisfactory. However, many of its aspects in the main school are outstanding. The curriculum in the school's specialist area is exceptional, and ensures a rewarding and rich experience for all pupils. In Key Stage 3, pupils are able to learn two modern foreign languages as well as Latin and the curriculum is further broadened by drama and dance. Pupils in Key Stage 4 have an outstanding and very rich range of subjects to choose from, including photography, music technology, business studies and child development. Vocational courses are developing. There is excellent provision to develop

learners' literacy and numeracy skills and adequate provision for citizenship and personal, social and health education. The use of ICT across the curriculum is developing soundly. This breadth and excellence comes at a price. There is not enough time in Years 8 and 9 to cover the programmes of study in ICT. Years 10 and 11 have a religious education 'theme day' each year, but it does not fulfil the full requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for pupils not on the popular and successful GCSE course. The sixth form curriculum caters well for those students. Twenty three high level subjects are on offer. Provision for students whose needs would be best served by following vocational courses is developing and links are being forged with other schools and colleges. The school does not meet the statutory requirement to teach religious education to all students. The school provides very good additional sessions for gifted and talented pupils and for those with learning difficulties and disabilities. A programme of after-school sessions provides very well for those pupils who wish to pursue wider study. There is an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, clubs and trips and a very high proportion of pupils attends and benefits from these. There is an excellent range of physical activities to keep learners healthy and the school encourages them to eat healthily. There are many good opportunities to participate in the local community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

These are good. There are well-established child protection procedures and staff work closely with outside agencies to support any pupils who may be at risk. Health and safety procedures are clear but the school recognises that in a large and complex site some outstanding matters could be dealt with more quickly. There is good communication between the school and parents who actively work together to help pupils make progress. Most parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They say that they and their children feel safe and secure. The pupil progress review days offer the chance for dialogue between subject staff and pupils, focusing well on pupils' self-assessment of their progress and an opportunity for them to reflect on the way forward. In addition, pupils know their personal targets well and say that these help them to learn more effectively. Pupils are well supported in their learning and personal development. There is considerable emphasis on pupils taking personal responsibility and this they do well. Pastoral care is of the highest quality and staff are especially supportive of those pupils who are vulnerable. Pupils with special educational needs are identified quickly and monitored effectively so that they make good progress. The programme for gifted and talented pupils is well-established and provides additional and effective learning activities. The assessment and monitoring of pupils' work is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

These are good. Parents overwhelmingly agree, both in their response to the inspection questionnaire and in the school's own survey. The headteacher and senior staff are

clearly focused on providing the best quality education for the pupils. The development of the arts provision has been exemplary and standards have considerably improved to exceptional levels in the arts. There is a strong leadership team with members whose skills complement each other well and who are quite capable of taking the school further forward. The team has been clear in the direction it has set for the school. The strategic plan reflects well the school's mission and drives forward necessary improvement and development. However, how its success is to be judged is not always made clear. The school is strengthening its already sound systems for monitoring the school's performance overall and that of individual subjects. There are clear links between the work of middle managers and the senior leadership team. This provides a good oversight of provision and satisfactory procedures for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning. Departments are given responsibility to work autonomously and develop provision in line with school policy. This is a strength. The school has a sound knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. It has successfully addressed variation in pupils' progress and improvements are being clearly made in English and science. However, decisive action to rectify the problems in the lack of time for teaching ICT in Years 8 and 9 has not been swift enough. Governance is satisfactory. The governors provide good support to the school and are knowledgeable about its strengths and weaknesses. They visit lessons and departments and regularly receive information about standards and quality of provision. Their minutes show that they could provide greater challenge at times. In addition, they do not ensure that all statutory requirements are met. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. Some accommodation is excellent but other accommodation is dilapidated and one ICT room is inadequate. The school is working to address the re-modelling or re-building of the whole site through a planned building programme.

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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?	2	2
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	3	2
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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?	2	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, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

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

Your school is good and there are many outstanding features to celebrate. A special thanks to those of you who met with inspectors during your recent inspection and to all of you for the polite and sensible way you conducted yourself. We were impressed by your self-confidence and thoughtfulness. You clearly behave in an exemplary manner and demonstrate your enjoyment of school and learning by your excellent attendance. You develop very well in your personal skills over your time in the school and the sixth form and you act as exemplary role models for younger pupils and are excellent ambassadors for the school in general. We particularly praised the: - consistently excellent results in the Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations - extremely high standards you reach in the 'arts' such as in art, photography dance, music and drama and the excellent programme of work in this area - considerable range of activities outside lessons which enrich your opportunities to learn - good leadership and management by Dr Burton and his senior team - new accommodation which is excellent - exemplary personal care that you receive when you have problems. We have asked the school to improve the following: - to ensure that you have enough time to learn ICT in Years 8 and 9, that all of you have the opportunity to learn ICT and religious education in Key Stage 4 and that the sixth form work contains aspects of religious education - to continue to keep a check on how well you are taught and how well you learn so as to ensure that you make the best progress across all subjects - to identify exemplary features in outstanding teaching so that your teachers know how they can improve their own teaching. Good luck for the future.