



The Ridgeway School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126451
LEA Swindon
Inspection number 282116
Inspection dates 28 September 2005 to 29 September 2005
Reporting inspector Tom Winskill HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Inverary Road
School category	Foundation		Wroughton
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Swindon, Wiltshire SN4 9DJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01793 846 106
Number on roll	1418	Fax number	01793 846 106
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Peter Lay
Date of previous inspection	18 October 1999	Headteacher	Mr Chris Walton

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	28 September 2005 - 29 September 2005	282116

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This large specialist science school and its sixth form serve a cluster of villages on the outskirts of Swindon and also take some learners from the nearby urban area. Learners come from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds although most are more generally advantaged. The percentage of learners entitled to free school meals is low. Most learners are of White British heritage and there are small numbers from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of learners for whom English is not their first language is below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education for its learners who achieve above average standards and make reasonable progress. Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. The senior leadership team has a clear view of the school's broad strengths and weaknesses which matches that taken by inspectors. Under the effective leadership of the joint acting headteachers, improvements in the quality of teaching and in pupil behaviour are taking place. Further improvements are in hand. There are some inconsistencies in the way subjects and year teams are led and managed and middle and senior managers do not yet monitor teaching and learning systematically.

Classroom teaching is good but marking, assessment, setting of homework and provision for very able learners in the classroom are at best inconsistent. Curriculum provision overall is satisfactory. The wide range of activities outside the classroom is well organised and well attended. Many learners, including those who are gifted and talented, achieve and develop very well as a result of this provision.

The learners in the main enjoy coming to school and are generally well cared for. They get on well together and with adults but do not yet have enough say in making decisions which affect them in school. Guidance to show learners the steps needed to improve the quality of their work and how they can meet challenging targets is lacking. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall as a result of a range of classroom and extra curricular activities. Attendance is around the national average and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Provision for the education of learners in the sixth form is satisfactory, although the school sees it as good. Learners come into the sixth form with standards that are slightly above average and they make satisfactory progress overall. Their progress has not been closely monitored, although methods are now in place to track their progress more effectively. Good guidance is given to learners in their choices of courses and they speak very highly of this. Teaching is satisfactory, but there is considerable variation between subjects. Learners understand what good work is and how to improve. Many are happy to work independently and are well motivated. Most go on to higher education having developed good skills and attitudes that will help them succeed in the wider community. The sixth form is well run.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve the progress made by all learners
- ensure learners, and parents, are fully aware of what they should achieve and the steps they need to take to meet challenging individual targets
- develop systematic, rigorous processes to ensure that all aspects of teaching, learning and guidance are of consistent high quality
- involve learners in making decisions that affect them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When learners join the school their standards are above average. They make satisfactory progress and achieve standards which are above average. The school sets challenging targets for its learners to meet by the end of each key stage. Some of these targets have not been met but the shortfall is only by a small margin.

At the end of Key Stage 4 the percentage of learners gaining five or more A*–C grades at GCSE has been consistently above the national average. Very few learners complete Key Stage 4 with no GCSE passes. Results are particularly high in English. The percentage of learners attaining the highest grades at GCSE is well above the national average in design and technology, English and French. There are considerable variations in the standards achieved by learners in other subjects. In Key Stage 3, standards in English, mathematics and science have been consistently above average.

Rates of progress vary both within and between each key stage. Most learners make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3. Boys who enter the school with lower standards, however, do not make enough progress in Key Stage 3. Overall progress in Key Stage 4 varies from year to year but is broadly satisfactory. Nevertheless, there was a decline in progress made by learners by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2004 compared to 2003. Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress.

Since its designation as a specialist school the school has made good progress with its community targets by developing links with its feeder primary schools and with the local community. The school has not met all its challenging examination targets set in the specialist school plan but standards in science improved at Key Stage 3 in 2005.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most learners say they enjoy their life at school. Their social development is good. Classroom relationships are positive and many learners are happily involved in out-of-lesson activities such as the numerous school productions. Very large numbers take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The behaviour of most learners in and out of lessons is satisfactory. It has improved recently but this has not yet been established as the norm.

Learners' development of moral values is satisfactory and is beginning to improve. For example, sixth formers regularly support younger learners with learning and behavioural difficulties. Assemblies make a strong contribution to learners' moral and social development. Spiritual development is satisfactory, mainly due to religious education teaching as contributions from other subjects are inconsistent. Good opportunities exist for cultural development, particularly in the performing arts. While some attention has been paid to multicultural issues the school recognises that this is an area for further development.

The school cares very well for its most vulnerable learners. Talented and committed specialist teachers and teaching assistants ensure that learners' wide range of needs does not provide an insuperable barrier to learning.

The school has begun to address the development of healthy lifestyles. Food available at lunchtime includes some wholesome dishes, but less healthy options like chips are most popular. Personal, social and health education lessons cover topics like drugs, smoking, alcohol, sex and relationships thoroughly. The physical education department promotes a wide range of sport and other outdoor activities both in and out of school time, helping to develop understanding of how to live a healthy life. Bullying is rare and dealt with effectively when it occurs. Child protection procedures are rigorous and secure.

Learners' contributions to the community are satisfactory, but inconsistent. Learners are involved in raising large sums for charities and in developing workplace skills. The school council has declined in recent years and many learners are unaware of what it does. However, there are good plans to rejuvenate this group.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, enabling learners to make sound progress. Lessons are typically well taught and there are instances of outstanding practice in several subjects. Where teaching and learning are outstanding, lessons demonstrate high quality planning, equally demanding expectations and great clarity in the way learners are shown how to raise the quality of their work. There is consistently good practice in behaviour management in the best lessons, enabling learners to stay focused on the task in hand.

Although classroom teaching is good, the long term impact on learners' progress is satisfactory rather than good. This is because, in many subjects, good classroom practice is not enhanced as effectively as it could be by good use of target setting, assessment and homework. Most learners are not fully aware about the levels or grades they as individuals are aiming for in each subject. Assessment and day-to-day marking fail to clarify how learners can improve the quality of their work. Teachers show consistently good subject knowledge and explain clearly and with authority. They work well with support assistants, enabling learners with learning difficulties and disabilities to make good progress. Gifted and talented learners, while supported very well by extra curricular activities, are not consistently given extension work or sufficiently challenging tasks in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum meets learners' needs satisfactorily. There are strengths and areas needing improvement. In the formal curriculum, for instance, learners reach high academic standards in design and technology because of very good provision, while their personal development is promoted very well by an outstanding personal, social, health and citizenship programme. A very good range of extra curricular activities, with high take up by learners, meets their needs and interests well especially sport, music, drama productions and the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. The curriculum modifications for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities are very effective, enabling these learners to make good progress. The recently opened Creative Planet Centre provides a focus for a range of scientific extra curricular activities as part of the specialist school provision.

The school is aware of less effective aspects of the curriculum and has already established several new components such as the work related learning programme and the vocationally orientated information and communication technology (ICT) course starting in Year 9. Action is underway to build up gifted, able and talented provision in the classroom, to match the good work done in extra curricular time, as well as additional literacy reinforcement for lower attaining learners.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support of learners are satisfactory across the school. Personal, social and health education, citizenship and work related learning all provide good guidance and contribute effectively to learners' personal development and well-being. Information from assessment is not used effectively to set targets for improvement. Progress of individual learners is not sufficiently monitored in some subjects or consistently across a range of subjects. Information about standards and progress of individual learners, however, does inform advice and guidance about courses to study at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

There is a programme for guidance that is intended to help learners understand how to study and achieve across all subjects. This is not yet monitored effectively and its use in tutor groups is haphazard. For some tutor groups this means the time at the start of the day is wasted.

Learners enjoy a safe environment and many say that they feel secure, understanding how and where they can access help when they need it. This is a safe and well ordered school. There are good arrangements for transfer from primary school where learners from higher up the school help to support younger learners. Learners moving on to higher education are well advised about their choices of education and careers. Learners with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The governing body has taken the unusual decision of appointing the school's deputy headteachers as joint acting headteachers in the interim period following the departure of the previous headteacher. The joint acting headteachers are providing a clear impetus for improvement. They are true to their word and back up their stated intentions with decisive action. The school's senior team judges leadership and management to be satisfactory which matches the view of inspectors. The senior leadership has many strengths but the effectiveness of middle management is inconsistent. The leadership of some subjects is outstanding but too much is mediocre and is not yet sufficiently driven by the need to improve the progress of all learners.

The senior team and the governing body have a good understanding of the strengths and weakness of the school. They have taken account of the views of staff and parents and, with governors' full support, senior staff have begun to take effective action to tackle correctly identified weaknesses. They are gaining the confidence of the staff and parents by improving the working atmosphere in the school and are beginning to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, the team recognises there is work to be done to sharpen the effectiveness of all management levels particularly through closer monitoring of the quality of teaching. Further priorities rightly identified include helping learners to understand more clearly what they should be aiming for and how they can meet challenging individual targets.

The senior team has demonstrated its ability to change things for the better in a relatively short time. Other leaders and managers have yet to demonstrate this across the board.

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?	3	3
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	3
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?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
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?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
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	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	No
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

The Ridgeway School Inverary Road Wroughton Swindon SN4 9DJ

30 September 2005

Dear Children,

Following our visit to inspect your school we would like to tell you our findings. We enjoyed our time at The Ridgeway, particularly visiting your lessons and discussing the school with you. You helped make us feel welcome. Your school has many strengths but also a number of areas where there is room for improvement.

You do well in examinations and national tests but we think you can do even better. Your joint acting headteachers have started to make improvements to the school which will help you make more progress. They are working with you and your teachers so that lessons are improving and helping you to behave better. They understand how the school can be improved further.

The school, including the sixth form, is well run but not all areas help you do your best at all times. Your teachers do a good job in the classroom. They could help you make more progress by improving the way your work is marked and how homework is used. We would also like your teachers to guide you more clearly about what you should achieve in each subject by setting targets. You should have more information about how you can improve the quality of your work.

You are well looked after in school and most of you enjoy coming to school. You get on well with each other and your teachers and other staff. We think you should have more say about what happens in your school and how you can help to improve it. A strength of the school is the range of activities outside lessons such as sport, drama and music amongst others. Many of you gain a great deal from your involvement in activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme.

Yours sincerely

Tom Winskill Her Majesty's Inspector