

Grey Court School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102922
Local Authority	Richmond Upon Thames
Inspection number	286530
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Barry Jones

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	922
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Frank Kitson
Headteacher	Ms Maggie Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2003
School address	Ham Street Ham Richmond TW10 7HN
Telephone number	020 8948 1173
Fax number	020 8332 2428

Age group	11–16
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2007
Inspection number	286530

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Grey Court is of average size. It is situated in an area of relative affluence but students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is a little below average. The school has higher proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and speaking English as an additional language than most schools.

The school was inspected in September 2003 and judged to require special measures. It was re-inspected in April 2005 and it was judged that special measures were no longer required. It has specialist status in science, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). The current headteacher took up post in January 2007. The school has experienced very high turnover in staff in recent years and falling rolls in the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Grey Court is a satisfactory and improving school. The journey from being in special measures has not been a smooth one, however. A period of high turnover of staff and several changes in leadership meant that some initiatives stalled and there have on occasion been marked dips in performance in external tests and examinations. The new headteacher has injected fresh energy and raised expectations. Although more remains to be done, through her very good leadership the school is back on track. This is recognised by the students and parents. One parent summed this up as, 'She has had a very positive impact. My son now feels that people expect him to achieve to the best of his abilities.'

Typically, students enter the school with attainment that is a little above average and leave with standards that are average in most years. This masks some differences in performance between different groups of students and subjects. The most able students are provided for well and make good progress. The school has been intent on ensuring that the headline figures for percentages of students attaining five or more higher grades at GCSE level and for level 5 in the Key Stage 3 tests improve. The school's tracking systems confirm that these goals have been achieved for the current Years 9 and 11. To accomplish this, the school has given most of its attention to tackling dips in performance at Key Stage 3 in 2005 and GCSE in 2006. It has done this rigorously and been successful so that most students now make at least satisfactory progress. For instance, the progress of students with English as an additional language has accelerated and is satisfactory. A marked reduction in the turnover of teachers and better teaching underpins this improvement.

In doing so, the school took its eye off the ball as regards lower attaining students. The new headteacher has started to rectify this. She quickly identified weaknesses in the identification procedures for learning support and arranged for an external audit. This has been done and so the school has a clear agenda for improvement but it is not yet implemented. The support for the lower attaining students therefore remains unsatisfactory and their progress is not monitored effectively. Teachers also vary in their effectiveness to plan work to meet their needs. Consequently, these students do not make the progress they should. As there is a significant group of students who are underperforming, overall achievement is inadequate. The school is now determined to improve this aspect of its work too and to become a truly inclusive one. Its recent track record of improvement shows that it has the ability to achieve this goal also.

The school has some innovative approaches to the curriculum that are helping to make learning more interesting and meaningful for the students. The school is very successful in making effective use of ICT to enable students to develop good computer skills and also to help them learn in other subjects. Some of these ventures are in their first year of implementation and so it is too early to judge their impact on raising standards. They are contributing to the students' enjoyment of school. Their personal development and well-being are satisfactory and some aspects are good. The many opportunities to participate in sport are a strength of the school and are part of the reason that students lead healthy lives. The school has had a strong focus on improving behaviour and the message that bad behaviour will not be tolerated has been understood by the students. There are still some instances of disruptive behaviour by a minority of students where there are inexperienced teachers. The school has used its specialist status for strengthening its links with its feeder primary schools and students have made a significant contribution to this evolving partnership.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Middle managers vary in their effectiveness but there has been a comprehensive training programme in the last year to enable them to extend their role. They do not evaluate fully the work of their departments and self-evaluation is principally done by senior managers. Self-evaluation is satisfactory and the school has identified most of its strengths and weaknesses. Given the improvements in teaching, the curriculum and more recently in raising achievement, capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

Raise standards and achievement by:

- ensuring that the identification of the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is accurate, that they receive the appropriate support and that their progress is monitored
- raising the quality of teaching further and ensuring that teachers plan work to meet the needs of all abilities
- ensuring that middle managers monitor and evaluate effectively their areas of responsibility.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards at GCSE level declined significantly in 2006 but the school's predictions indicate that they have risen again in 2007. In 2006, although results were a little above the national average on one important measure, they were much lower than they should have been and the school missed its targets. The most able students make good progress and the proportion of A or A* grades was higher than expected in 2006. There is too much variation in the performance between subjects although the gap is being reduced as a result of the school's efforts. In GCSE examinations, there were other underachieving groups, particularly White British. The school has tackled this dip in performance rigorously. It has improved monitoring, made effective use of consultants and employed intervention strategies well. As a result, most students and groups of students now make satisfactory progress. However, a significant proportion of the students with learning difficulties and disabilities make unsatisfactory progress and this is not yet being tackled with the same vigour.

The signs are encouraging at Key Stage 3. Results improved significantly in 2006 after dipping in 2005 and the school's tracking shows that this trend continued in 2007. Improvement in the quality of teaching is the major reason. This is due to more stability in staffing and is as a result of the school's monitoring and training programmes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is good. A very good assembly was seen that enabled students to think about relationships and to explore their own feelings. Behaviour is satisfactory and improving and this is shown by the reducing number of exclusions. This is the result of a systematic approach by staff to managing behaviour with an appropriate balance of rewards and sanctions. Students say that there is little bullying and the occasional incidents are dealt with effectively by adults. Students feel safe and they consequently enjoy

school. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality has improved since the previous inspection through increased staff vigilance and improved data collection and analysis. A few students continue to arrive late for lessons, however. The collegium, as the school council is known, is effective and its views are valued. For instance, its members instigated a recycling project. Students make a satisfactory contribution to the community and have helped design posters for the Ham Open Gardens event. Students in Year 9 are being trained to act as buddies for pupils in primary schools. Students are satisfactorily prepared for the next stage in their life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. However, the school's own monitoring shows that it requires more time to make up for gaps in students' knowledge resulting from weaknesses in teaching in the past. The gains made in teaching are not reflected fully in examinations but they do augur well for better results in the future. New staff are making a significant contribution while other teachers have improved through constructive feedback and further training. Teachers make good use of ICT. They have good subject knowledge and most maintain students' interest in the lessons by using a range of learning strategies, including group work and discussion. Most have good behaviour management strategies and organise their classes well. A few teachers are able to teach good lessons to well-motivated students but cannot establish the same positive climates and a good pace to learning in some classes with predominately low attaining students. Consequently, a minority of these lessons are disrupted by the misbehaviour of a few students. There are inconsistencies which reflect to an extent the variation in the quality of middle managers to monitor effectively the work in their departments. These are in the quality of marking, the setting of homework and providing suitable work for students of all abilities. The range is from unsatisfactory to excellent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It has been improved in the last two years through some innovative initiatives. For instance, in Year 7 the introduction of the 'opening minds' project has been well received by students. This brings together English, ICT, religious education and history and is taught by one teacher. This takes up a quarter of the taught time for a Year 7 class. This helps to smooth the transition for students from a small primary to a large secondary school. It also helps students to form links between these subjects. There are now different combinations of subjects at Key Stage 4 which gives students a good choice of academic, vocational or a mix of the two. The Key Stage 4 curriculum now meets the needs of students well and this is shown by the predicted rise in results at GCSE level in 2007. A strength is the use of ICT in all subjects. There is a good programme for gifted and talented students, including visits and visiting speakers. The curriculum for lower attaining students has been improved in Key Stage 4 but there are weaknesses in the implementation of the curriculum for these students throughout the school. The provision for personal, social and health education is good and is leading to improvements in students' personal development. The school provides a good range of enrichment activities. Participation in sports, drama and musical productions is high and adds much to students' enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The strengths are in the help given to vulnerable children and the effective support for pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties. Students are able to go to student support officers and many potential problems are resolved very quickly. Additional opportunities for restorative justice have enabled students to work together effectively. There are weaknesses in the support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Identification of students for additional literacy support and other programmes is not systematic or based on clear criteria. Evaluation of the progress made by students as a result of interventions is just being established.

Academic guidance for most pupils is satisfactory and improving. The school has developed a very good system for tracking individual students' progress and this makes it less likely that underachievement will go undetected in the future. The students are being set increasingly challenging targets and there are timely reviews each half term. Students know their targets and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has made an immediate impact and given extra impetus to the work of the school. She has set out a clear vision both for raising standards and creating a good ethos in the school. This is commented on positively by parents and one wrote, 'I am impressed by the changes the headteacher has made in such a short time.' She is well supported by her senior team. Together, they have driven policies that improved students' behaviour and accelerated the progress made by students. This has been accomplished through strengthening the procedures for monitoring the progress of students. It has also been aided by thorough monitoring of teaching quality although the assessments do not focus sufficiently on the progress being made by students. Data are used well to inform decisions by senior managers but full use is not made of the school's own data to check on trends for particular groups of students. The headteacher has taken difficult decisions and this has underpinned the improvement. The difference in performance between subjects is partly explained by high staff turnover and partly by some inconsistency between the managers. This is recognised and is being addressed. However, the quality of plans produced by middle managers is still variable and some are not sufficiently evaluative. The school is not successful in ensuring that lower attaining students achieve as well as they can.

The school has a deficit budget. The amount of the overspend by the school has increased since the previous inspection because the number of students joining in Year 7 has fallen. The school has been slow to address this but the headteacher and governors are now taking tough decisions which are improving the financial situation of the school. The governors are supportive of the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
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	3
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	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

6 July 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Grey Court School, Richmond, TW10 7HN

Thank you very much for the help that you gave us when we inspected your school. You spoke enthusiastically about the improvements in the school since the headteacher arrived in January. You tell us that you enjoy school, feel safe and that behaviour has improved. Poor behaviour is now the exception. You also appreciate the many opportunities that you have to participate in sport, drama productions and musical events. Members of the collegium told us that their views are valued. For instance, their suggestion for a recycling project was accepted and acted upon by the school.

The school has been through a difficult period. Some of the older pupils told us how many changes of teacher and headteacher they had experienced. This seems to be behind the school now. Overall, we judge the school to be satisfactory and improving. This is reflected in the increasing pride that you have in being a student at Grey Court. The teaching, results and your behaviour are all improving.

There are three things that we have asked the school to do in order to improve things further.

- Ensure that the students in the lower sets achieve as well as they can.
- Aim for all teaching to be good and that the work they set for you all is challenging and makes you think.
- Involve heads of department more in checking that you are doing well in their subject.

You can play your part by continuing to behave well and by asking if you do not understand in class. The teachers have your interests at heart and will be pleased to help.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Barry Jones Lead inspector