



The Emmbrook School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110060
Local Authority Wokingham District Council
Inspection number 288576
Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Anne Wellham HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Emmbrook Road
School category	Community		Wokingham
Age range of pupils	11–19		RG41 1JP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01189 784406
Number on roll (school)	1138	Fax number	01189 892059
Number on roll (6th form)	171		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr David Cornish
		Headteacher	Mr Nigel Matthias
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Emmbrook School is an average sized, mixed comprehensive with a sixth form. It takes students from the full range of ability but overall the attainment when they start the school is above average. The school serves a broad area and about half of the students travel some distance to get to school. The great majority of students are of White British heritage with small numbers from a range of minority ethnic groups including travellers. A low percentage of students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average, while the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well below average. The school acquired specialist status in mathematics and computing in 2005. There have been significant changes to staffing during the past two years. The current headteacher took up his post at the beginning of this academic year.

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 is providing a satisfactory education and is an improving school. This is reflected in the views of a parent who wrote, 'I think the school is now on the road to a good future and will go from strength to strength'.

Since the last inspection there was a period of two years when a feasibility study took place, considering possible closure and re-siting of the school. This, combined with changes in senior leadership, a significant turnover of staff and difficulties with accommodation meant that progress on key issues identified during the last inspection has been slower than it should have been. The school achieved specialist status for mathematics and computing in 2005 which has led to improved access to information and communication technology (ICT) for pupils and staff. The school has exceeded specialist targets for mathematics and ICT at Key Stage 3 and almost all at Key stage 5. However specialist school targets for Key Stage 4 have not been achieved.

The school has a new headteacher who is committed to driving improvement forward and knows what needs to be done. He is supported by a dedicated senior leadership team and a governing body, with several new members, which provides a good level of challenge. The sixth form is well led with recent changes in leadership bringing about improvement.

Standards are improving. Students reach standards that are above the national average at all Key Stages. The progress that students make in relation to their starting points is beginning to show an upward trend. It is now satisfactory although not all groups achieve as well as they could. Strategies to raise achievement have had impact in subjects where there is strong leadership and where teaching is focused on improving learning, notably in mathematics. The school is using a wide range of data to enable teachers and departments to monitor and assess the progress of their students. However, it is not analysed in ways that are easily understood by all staff so that underachievement is not successfully addressed in all subjects. Students are set targets but they do not always understand what they have to do to achieve them.

The school provides a caring environment and relationships between staff and students are good. Guidance to students on how to achieve their academic potential is not as well developed as the systems of pastoral care in the school. Students are polite and well behaved. During the past few years behaviour has been an issue but it is being tackled effectively through a new focus on positive behaviour for learning. Teaching is not always as good as it could be. Most students progress despite this. They enjoy lessons where they can participate in different activities and where teachers are consistent in their approach to learning. Students are passive in lessons where they are given too few opportunities to express themselves or develop their arguments fully.

The school has good capacity to improve further. The leadership team and the governing body have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are able to identify clearly the correct areas for development through self evaluation. The school correctly recognises that managers at all levels are not

sufficiently involved in reviewing and evaluating their areas of responsibility and planning for improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory overall and good in some respects. The recent changes in leadership and management have brought improvements. Students develop as confident and mature adults. They achieve well because of good attendance, the high expectations set for them and the good individual care, guidance and support they receive. They welcome the many opportunities to play a full part in school life and respond well by making a positive contribution in supporting and setting a good example to younger learners.

Effective monitoring of provision has identified the need to address the inconsistency in teaching in some subject areas. Resources are not yet used effectively and the curriculum is currently not broad enough to provide sufficient pathways for all learners' interests and abilities. The school is aware of this, and taking the right steps to make changes so the capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning to raise achievement.
- Analyse performance data more effectively to identify potential underachievement at an early stage.
- Improve consistency and quality of guidance so students are aware of their targets and how to achieve them.
- Involve middle managers more extensively in monitoring, evaluating and reviewing their areas of responsibility to improve provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations in 2006 were above national averages. Results in 2005 had been lower than in 2006. Subsequent action taken by the school resulted in the higher standards attained in 2006.

When they enter the school at age 11 standards are above average. The school's analysis identifies that students who took the Year 9 tests in 2006 made good progress in mathematics and English and satisfactory progress in science. This was a significant improvement in English, where progress made by students who sat the tests in 2005 was well below average. The rate of progress has also improved in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is now satisfactory although there is inconsistency between subjects. As a result of action taken by the school following results in 2005, greater progress was

made in 2006 by lower attaining girls and pupils with learning difficulties. The progress of middle ability boys remains below average.

Students' achievement in the sixth form is good. Standards are above average and achievement has improved over recent years with the average points score for students in 2006 representing good achievement given their prior attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is working hard to promote the personal development and well-being of the students and although this area is satisfactory there are strengths and improving features. Students are increasingly committed to supporting the school and show this through their good behaviour and respect for each other. Whilst their moral, social and cultural development is good, spiritual development needs extending. Many are keen to be involved in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, some of which reflect the school's computing specialist status. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now satisfactory. The school is making good efforts to encourage students to choose healthy options at lunchtime and to provide greater opportunities for physical activity. The students' response is satisfactory.

Students adopt safe practices and are well informed about issues relating to their health and well-being. The school council provides a good forum for students to share ideas and take responsibility. Students feel that their views are listened to and action is taken. Fundraising events have a high priority in the school and help raise considerable sums of money for good causes, both at home and abroad. While work experience and enterprise activities help students to develop workplace skills they are not as effective in improving their ICT skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching is inconsistent across the school as it does not provide sufficient challenge for all groups of students. Some lessons lack pace and use limited strategies to actively involve students. In lessons where students respond well, they see the relevance of their learning and make good progress. Carefully targeted questioning helps students to develop their knowledge and understanding.

Teachers do not always identify precisely what students are expected to learn. As a result students are sometimes unclear about why they are undertaking an activity. The quality of marking is inconsistent. Verbal and written feedback does not always help students to know what they need to do to improve. In contrast the most effective

teachers use their accurate assessment of work to enable students to make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum and good opportunities to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities. All students receive a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3 that meets statutory requirements. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is traditional and broadly academic. It meets the needs of the majority of students. An increasing number benefit from following vocational courses in school and at college. Plans to broaden the range of academic and vocational courses offered are underway, for example in partnership with the Wokingham Federation. Work related learning, including work experience, is well-established and provides students with positive experiences through, for example, regular enterprise days in Years 9 and 10. The provision of citizenship, religious education and personal, social and health education through cultural studies is well planned although difficulties with staffing have led to some disaffection amongst students in these areas. The school's mathematics and computing specialist status has allowed for improved resources which are having a positive impact in some subjects. For example, a French lesson provided students with the challenge of using their ICT and language skills when selecting and annotating designs for a virtual theme park. However, ICT is not used successfully by all teachers to meet the needs of students of different interests and abilities.

The sixth form curriculum, with its emphasis on AS and A levels, is not sufficiently varied, inclusive and flexible. The school is rightly addressing this by developing a range of vocational courses from September 2007.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the care of students. Students know who they can turn to if they need help. They feel safe in school, supported by the high levels of supervision throughout the day. Students say that this reduces bullying, which is always dealt with very effectively. There are good links with local authority and other external agencies so that vulnerable students are well cared for. Careers advice and support are good and ensure that students are well informed about the options available to them for the next stage of education and working life. Guidance to students on how to achieve their academic potential is not as well developed as the systems of pastoral care in the school and is not yet good enough to support whole school improvement. A range of intervention strategies are in place to tackle underachievement and are beginning to have a positive effect on students' progress.

Students value the care, guidance and support they receive in the sixth form. Good systems are in place to assess how well they are progressing and the high expectations of staff help students meet their targets. They receive good support in making decisions about their next educational choices, for example in deciding about university courses and as a result are confident that they have been well prepared for life beyond school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior leadership team is led well by the headteacher who is determined to improve all aspects of the school. He has a 'can do' attitude and gives the school a clear sense of direction. Self evaluation at senior manager level identifies the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately and is focused on raising standards. The school has worked successfully to improve students' behaviour and attendance and to raise achievement. Middle managers are involved in self evaluation and review of their areas of responsibility but this is inconsistently applied across subjects and year groups so that underachievement is not tackled consistently. The senior leadership team have a broad range of information on students' attainment and progress which they analyse to see whether targets have been met. However, more work needs to be done across the whole staff to ensure that students' progress is carefully tracked and that assessment information is used effectively in the classroom. The school has introduced rigorous procedures for monitoring teaching and learning which is linked well to supporting the professional development of staff through coaching and mentoring.

The well informed and supportive governing body has a very good knowledge of the school's priorities for development and is working closely with senior leaders to improve it further, particularly in ensuring that resources are deployed efficiently and effectively to achieve value for money.

Leadership and management of the sixth form is satisfactory overall with a good capacity to improve. The new head of the sixth form provides good leadership and he is well supported by the headteacher and the senior leadership team. The steps already introduced for improvement, such as attendance registration, enhanced ICT resources and e-learning opportunities, and academic monitoring have already made a positive impact on student progress and motivation. Students rightly have commented on the new leadership as being instrumental in the improved performance of the sixth form. Many of the newer initiatives need to be embedded in staff practice throughout the sixth form for greater impact. The leadership team are currently reviewing the cost effectiveness of some of the courses on offer to provide value for money.

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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

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	2	
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	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	3
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 to below 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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we made about your school.

- We think your school provides you with a satisfactory education and a safe, caring environment in which to learn. The staff, sixth formers and pupils work hard to make sure that bullying and racism rarely happen.
- Behaviour was not as good in the past but it has improved. One of the students told us that behaviour is not 'fantastic' yet. We hope you will try your hardest to make it fantastic soon.
- Most students are keen to do well and achieve good results in examinations. Even though the results are good there are some groups of students who do not do as well as they could. We were pleased that in the sixth form nearly all students finish their course and achieve good results.
- You told us how much you enjoy extra curricular activities, especially for sport.
- Some lessons are not taught as well as they could be. You told us that you enjoy lessons most when teachers use different ways of involving you, making you think for yourselves and when ICT is used to help you learn.

To make your school even better we think your school needs to:

- improve the quality of teaching and learning so all students do as well as they can
- make sure that all teachers tell you your targets and how to achieve them
- give more responsibility to year coordinators and subject leaders for deciding what is working well and identifying things that need to improve.

Thank you for taking part in the inspection. We wish you success for the future.

Anne Wellham HMI