

Reading School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110097
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection number	288589
Inspection dates	22–23 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Wiola Hola HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	879
6th form	277
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Philip Mitchell
Headteacher	Mr John Weeds
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2001
School address	Erleigh Road Reading RG1 5LW
Telephone number	01189 015600
Fax number	01189 352755

Age group	11–18
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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 school is broadly average in size but with a large sixth form. About three-quarters of students are from White British backgrounds and others are from a wide range of backgrounds. Attainment on entry is well above average in this selective grammar school. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is well below average. Students' circumstances are generally favourable. The percentage of students whose first language is not English is above average but there are no students at an early stage of English language acquisition. Students' mobility is low. The school has been a specialist school in Humanities from September 2005. It has boarding provision for up to 75 boarders.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that enables students to reach exceptionally high standards both in their academic work and in their personal development. Students thrive because teaching and learning are outstanding and because much is provided beyond lessons. As one student said, 'We aim to succeed in our work but there is so much more to enjoy.' Students are highly motivated, rise to challenges, and develop very well their skills of independence as well as collaboration when working. They are confident, and courteous and considerate to each other, staff and visitors. They speak of the passion that many teachers bring to their work and a love of their subjects that students recognise, are inspired by, and that make learning so engaging in many cases. The vast majority of parents are highly supportive of the school and value what it offers.

Students experience an excellent curriculum. It includes a wide range of subjects and enrichment activities that meets their needs and interests. Students particularly enjoy the many and varied sporting activities. They feel that facilities for physical education are relatively poor although the field in front of the school is both delightful and valuable for sport and recreation. Another factor behind students' excellent achievement is the care, guidance and support they receive. These are good overall for day students and for the boarders. The school's status as a Humanities Specialist College has had a huge impact on many aspects of school life, on the work of subjects across the curriculum and in the wider community.

Leadership and management are excellent. The new headteacher has built upon existing strengths with a freshness of vision. He has increased the rigour with which some management practices are implemented or indeed developed them. He is extremely well supported by the senior team and many other middle leaders and managers. Senior leaders are committed to developing the skills of staff and leaders for the future, and the new management structure for September 2007 exemplifies this. The previous inspection report stated that the school was excellent but not complacent and this is still the case now. The school has improved since the last inspection and has outstanding capacity to improve further. The senior team is correctly seeking to bring greater consistency to the way in which subject leaders compile and use data on students' attainment although this is done very effectively, albeit in different ways, in most areas. Governors are well organised, highly supportive and hold the school to account as they should. The school's one-year development plan is entirely appropriate but plans for the longer term, and the finances to support them, are not laid out formally. Governors are seeking to develop the school buildings, primarily for physical education, science and for dining as there are indeed some shortcomings in these areas.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. Virtually all students continue their education from Year 11 into the sixth form and achieve extremely well in their chosen courses. Standards are well above national averages. Progress is outstanding because of consistently high quality teaching, which has improved since the last inspection, and because of students' exemplary attitudes to learning. The curriculum is excellent with an extensive range of A-level courses and enrichment opportunities. Sport, drama and music clubs or teams exist for all abilities, from those who want to learn new skills to those who have aspirations to test their abilities in challenging arenas outside the school. Students' personal development is outstanding. Students communicate

confidently with adults and relationships are respectful and mature. They feel very well supported. The school's systems for tracking and reviewing students' progress contribute greatly to students' success. Students say their tutors and teachers 'keep us on task'. They add, 'Teaching is always interesting and if we are not clear about something teachers will always go over it until we are'. Teachers have outstanding subject knowledge and the best lessons are creative and highly engaging. They provide excellent opportunities for students to learn independently. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Boarding provision makes an excellent contribution to the personal development and well-being of those students who board by providing high quality care and guidance.

Students are well motivated, growing in maturity and confidence as they pass through the school. The last report by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in February 2005 raised two major issues and a few minor ones that have all been addressed fully. The school meets the National Minimum Standard (NMS) for boarding provision.

Students say that they enjoy boarding very much because they have the opportunity to work hard as well as benefiting from good company. They value the high levels of care that they receive from all staff. Days are well planned from breakfast time through to evening 'prep' and include sporting activities such as ice-skating, water skiing and visits to the fitness centre. Other activities include geography, film and theatre clubs. Students from each boarding house have representative councils that meet to discuss topics of mutual interest or concern. They have been known to meet directly with the catering manager when they wished to discuss the school meals and their interests in healthy eating.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine further the systems for keeping a close check on students' progress so as to improve senior managers' capacity to analyse it swiftly.
- Ensure that strategic plans for the longer term are articulated formally and supported with appropriate financial planning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' standards are exceptionally high. Students leave Year 13 with outstanding A-level results that show the excellent progress they have made over their whole time at the school. Students in Year 8 have generally mastered work normally covered in Years 7 to 9 and then in Year 9 often start to tackle work covered in GCSE courses. In 2006, every single student reached Level 8 in mathematics, the highest possible level in the national end of Year 9 tests: in science, virtually all reached the highest possible grade as well. English results were excellent but not quite as high as those in mathematics and science. In 2006, 90% of students gained five or more GCSE passes with grades A* or A, and nearly four in ten students gained eleven such passes. Compared with GCSE results in other subjects they took, students in 2006 did particularly well in classical studies, economics, chemistry, mathematics, business studies, physics, German, French and biology. Achievement in A-level examinations has been particularly strong in mathematics and science for some years and in the last few years it has also been high in

classical civilisation and economics. In 2006, achievement in A-level results was least good in design and technology but school records indicate an improvement in the current year.

There are very few students with learning difficulties or disabilities and they achieve as well as their peers because the school ensures that they receive the right form of support. There is no discernible gap in the achievement of students from different backgrounds.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students demonstrate excellent attitudes and behaviour together with very high attendance. Students are confident, articulate, and are very supportive of the school. They share excellent relationships with the teachers and enjoy all aspects of school life. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students is outstanding and contributes to the very positive ethos of the school. Students readily join in activities that enrich these areas, such as cultural and sporting events in the school, locally and abroad.

Students say that they feel safe and well supported by all staff. A few parents express a concern about bullying and, although the students say this sometimes occurs, they add that it is dealt with firmly and effectively by the school. The school places much emphasis on encouraging students to adopt a healthy lifestyle and students understand what this means. The many opportunities for sport, healthy diet options and the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programmes ensure that this encouragement has a positive impact.

Students have many opportunities to play an active role both within the school and in the local community. The school council is a wonderful example of the commitment of the students in school life especially concerning environmental issues. Students are extremely well prepared for their own economic well-being because they reach high academic standards and because their personal qualities are so admirable.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. The school monitors the quality of teaching and learning closely and evaluates it accurately as part of a new effective subject review process. Students are highly appreciative of the exceptionally good subject knowledge and expertise of the teachers. Students' confidence in their teachers is reflected in warm relationships and students are quick to say how this helps them to engage in classroom activities. When describing their lessons, students talk positively about the interesting tasks, variety of learning styles, being encouraged to take responsibility and make decisions, being challenged and made to work hard in lessons and for homework. They compliment teachers' use of interactive whiteboards, particularly in modern foreign languages and classics.

Teachers use data on students' attainment extremely well in most cases to keep a check on progress. Students know what levels they are working at and what they need to do to improve. They can talk confidently and accurately about this part of their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding curriculum matches students' needs and aspirations. It contributes greatly to students' personal development as well as to their academic success. The positive ethos of the school is due in many ways to the high level of spiritual, moral, social and cultural content in all areas of the curriculum. Students talk readily about favourite subjects or ones where they learn the most, and mathematics and Latin feature high on the list for a significant number of students because the content is so challenging.

The curriculum and timetable for students in Years 10 to 13 are arranged in a manner that allows students to choose freely from a wide range of courses and subject combinations. This contributes to the high level of enjoyment shown by the students in their learning. The school has acted very positively to address the relative weakness identified in the previous inspection report concerning information and communication technology (ICT). Students make good use of ICT across the curriculum. The school is introducing a nationally recognised ICT qualification for all students in Years 10 and 11 from September 2007.

The range of enrichment, support and sporting activities offered outside lesson time is extensive and represents outstanding provision. Students have many opportunities to contribute their services to the school and in the local community. The school is especially proud of the support sixth form students offer to local primary schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are good with outstanding features. Staff are well trained in the safeguarding of students and systems for ensuring their safety and well-being are robust. Students know to whom they can turn if they are anxious. Form tutors play an important and effective role in caring for and guiding students and are supported well by senior students who provide counselling for the younger ones. The school takes good account of students' views, through the school council and in other ways. For example, students were keen to be involved in the healthy schools initiative and, consequently, a change was made to the school meal menus. Provision for the lunchtime is a relative weakness and both staff and students bemoan the lack of space for dining; this shortcoming is particularly problematic in inclement weather. The school does much to encourage students to maintain or improve their physical well-being. Advice to students on careers and subject choices is good.

Students receive very good oral and written feedback in most cases about how well they are doing and what to aim for next. Teachers generally keep excellent individual records of students' progress but methods of recording attainment data vary from subject to subject. The school has recognised this and a database is being developed to provide a common formalised method of managing data so as to improve the analysis of progress for students in Years 7 to 11. In the sixth form, analysis of progress across all the subjects each student studies is undertaken extremely well and used to excellent effect to guide their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The new headteacher has a very clear vision and high expectations for the school's further development. He is given excellent support from senior staff who play a very effective role in school improvement. In his first year he has already built upon existing strengths in the school and developed staff skills, particularly in methods of evaluating provision and outcomes. Senior managers have an entirely accurate view of school's effectiveness, through comprehensive department reviews and other means. Strategies are in place for the improvement of the few areas where shortcomings have been identified. The leadership and management of middle leaders are also excellent in most cases. There are inconsistencies, however, in the ways in which individual departments keep records. They make analysis difficult in some respects although they do not impact negatively on students' progress. Staff development is valued and used effectively to improve the quality of teaching and the quality of management.

Governance is good. Governors act as 'critical friends' and they set a strategic direction which has standards and achievement, in addition to the well-being of students, at its core. They work well with the senior management team in managing the development of the school. Staff deployment and the day-to-day financial planning and management of resources are efficient and effective. Short term planning is well matched to current income and expenditure. The school appreciates that there is a need for longer term strategic planning which is supported by focused budgetary projections: whilst plans exist, these are not laid out formally nor are they costed.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
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	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

8 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Reading School, Reading, RG1 5LW

I would like to thank you for the very valuable contributions you made in helping us when we visited your school recently to inspect it. We took every opportunity to speak to as many of you as possible and greatly appreciated these conversations. I would like to tell you about our findings.

Reading School is outstanding. It enables you to achieve extremely well not just academically but also in other ways. Standards at the school are exceptionally high at all stages. Also striking is your courtesy, care and consideration for each other, staff and visitors and the way that you enjoy and value what the school provides. Moreover, so many of you play vital parts in making the school a supportive community, and one in which service to each other and the wider world matters. We saw this in the way you treat each other, care for the environment, reflect thoughtfully on what constitutes good teaching and learning, and in the way you told us about what is good or not so good about the school.

From discussions with you, looking at your work and examination results, teachers' plans and records, and other documents, we are satisfied that the headteacher and senior staff have made an entirely accurate assessment of the school's effectiveness. The leadership and management of the school, not just of the senior staff, are excellent. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding, as is the curriculum which includes a vast selection of enrichment opportunities. You are very well cared for, supported and guided in your work. We agree with you that facilities for science, physical education and dining have some shortcomings and governors have told us that they are planning improvements in these.

We found that teachers keep excellent records of your work and progress and use them well to plan lessons, inform you about how well you are doing and what you should be aiming for next. Because these records are kept in various ways, analysis of progress by senior staff is not as efficient as it might be. We have asked the school to further refine its systems for record keeping. We have also asked that strategic plans for the school's future be set out more clearly and supported with appropriate financial planning.

The large majority of your parents are understandably very supportive of the school and appreciate all that it offers. We wish you all the very best for your own future and for the future of the school.

Yours sincerely,

Wiola Hola,

Her Majesty's Inspector