



Robertsbridge Community College

Inspection Report - Amended

Unique Reference Number 114588
Local Authority East Sussex
Inspection number 289984
Inspection dates 20–21 September 2006
Reporting inspector Clare Gillies

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Knelle Road
School category	Community		Robertsbridge
Age range of pupils	11–16		TN32 5EA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01580 880360
Number on roll (school)	623	Fax number	01580 882120
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Susan Prochak
		Headteacher	Karen Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	20–21 September 2006	289984

Amended Report Addendum

Report updated to resolve formatting inconsistency

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Robertsbridge is a small school with more boys than girls, especially in Year 11. The school serves a large, mainly rural area. A lower than average proportion of students is eligible for free school meals. Very few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and all students speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is lower than average. The school gained specialist status in mathematics and computing in September 2004. It has gained a Sportsmark Award and a Silver Standard Award for healthy eating and fitness.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Leadership and management are good and the new headteacher is leading the school well. The school has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Supported by an effective senior leadership team, the headteacher has already made several improvements. The school has a number of good features but not all of the changes made recently have been in place long enough to improve the school's overall effectiveness beyond satisfactory. Weaknesses exist in the curriculum and the improved systems for checking students' work have not yet made an impact on raising standards significantly. Nevertheless, good progress has been made since the last inspection in implementing a system to check the performance of staff, improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy and using marking and assessment more effectively.

Students say they are learning better because lessons are calmer than last year. Other changes also confirm that the school has good capacity to improve and to return to the high standards it achieved a few years ago. A local primary school headteacher describes the school as 'on the up and up'.

Teaching and learning are good. They are no longer unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 as they were at the time of the last inspection. Some outstanding teaching occurs in several subjects. Leadership and management of subjects are mostly good, especially in English, mathematics, science, physical education and history, and as a result standards are rising in these subjects.

Standards are average and getting better because students are making good progress and achieving well. Teachers make students' learning more focused because most of them use assessment data methodically. Staffing difficulties during the last year, which particularly affected students' progress in science, graphics and information and communication technology (ICT), have largely been resolved. Progress in science is now much more secure but remains inconsistent in graphics and ICT. In 2005, the Year 9 test results were average. Students made outstanding progress in mathematics, one of the school's specialist areas. The results improved in English, mathematics and science in 2006. The GCSE results were average in 2005 but they dropped in 2006. In both years, students achieved well in English and mathematics, where staffing was stable. Results in ICT and graphics were low. Performance in ICT was a weakness at the last inspection and the school has made insufficient progress in this area, despite the school's specialist status.

The curriculum is unsatisfactory. The time allocated for English and mathematics in Years 7 to 9 and to science in all years is less than that seen in most schools. The poor ICT results are partly explained by students having far too little time to complete the course by the end of Year 10. In addition, no ICT is taught in Year 11. Further weaknesses include the limited time spent studying citizenship and environmental issues, and the narrow range of vocational courses available.

Students enjoy school, feel safe and well cared for and try to lead healthy lifestyles, at home as well as at school. Many participate in sport. They behave well and most

work hard in lessons. Their personal development and well-being, and their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development are good. Students do not value elements of the personal, social and health education programme. Its content has not been updated recently and it is taught by too many non-specialists. The students' contribution to the community is satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support for students are good. They are particularly thoughtful for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities. The warm, respectful relationships at all levels make students sensitive to each other's needs. Academic guidance has been sharpened up so that students have realistic targets, which they are keen to achieve. Students receive satisfactory careers advice and have a sound understanding of the world of work. Most proceed on to further education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in graphics and ICT and cover all requirements of the ICT specialist status plans.
- Increase the time allocated to English and mathematics in Years 7 to 9, to science in all years and to ICT in Years 10 and 11, and extend the range of vocational courses offered.
- Improve the content, teaching and resources for personal, social and health education, including citizenship.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' standards on entry to the school are just below average. Standards by Year 9 and Year 11 are average and getting better because students are making good progress and achieving well. Until 2005 the Year 9 test results were above average. In 2005 students did not do as well in English and science but they achieved very well in mathematics. Results went up in all three subjects in 2006, especially in science, and in mathematics at the higher levels. Students do well in art, physical education and history lessons.

Students achieved well in GCSE English and mathematics in 2006, as in 2005, although the percentage of students attaining five or more A*– C grades dropped to below average. This was because the results in science, and in ICT and graphics especially, were low. The new head of science has improved standards in the GCSE years.

Students of all abilities and backgrounds make similar progress. The gap between boys' and girls' performance is less than that seen nationally. Staff and students attribute this to the very good relationships they have and the fact that it is not 'uncool' for boys to work hard and succeed. In 2006 boys did better than girls in art and design, textiles, history and mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Attendance is above average and students arrive promptly for lessons. They enjoy school, highlighting the wonderful atmosphere and activities at Christmas time. Parents are supportive and feel their children do well at the school.

Students' attitudes to work are generally positive, reflected in their good behaviour during lessons. In a few lessons some chatter holds back learning. The school is lively as students are high spirited. Their behaviour can be boisterous, but in a harmless way. The school encourages them to be happy and to enjoy each other's company. The school excluded high numbers of students over the past two years but as students' behaviour has improved, so the number of exclusions is falling. Students are confident that the rare instances of bullying are tackled firmly. Thoughtless behaviour on the buses in recent weeks was nipped in the bud. Lunchtimes are sociable, relaxed and well supervised.

Students learn to respect others and respond well to encouragement to stay safe, eat healthily and take regular exercise. Sport is a strength of the school's provision. Students do not rate highly the sex and drugs education they receive. Some staff who teach the personal, social and health education course lack the relevant expertise to teach the course successfully.

Students have mixed perceptions of the school council. Some believe it is effective, but others do not. The council did not meet during the last term of the past academic year but the new headteacher has already held a meeting. She, and the students, are keen to see the council consider issues within the wider community. The school does little to recycle materials or consider local environmental issues.

Students' contribution to the community is satisfactory. For example, they support sporting activities in primary schools and the choir sings in a care home at Christmas. Students are generous in raising money for charities. They are making satisfactory progress in developing the skills needed for their future economic well-being and for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has developed a culture where students enjoy learning. They join in lessons attentively and talk confidently about what they have learned. They articulate both sides of an argument and pose thoughtful questions such as: 'Why do countries willingly help each other after natural disasters but also fight each other?'

Most teachers plan lessons well to match students' interests and abilities and use interactive whiteboards to make lessons interesting. Occasionally, they do not use enough visual or active stimuli to address the different ways students learn.

Some excellent teaching exists in a number of subjects. For example, in a physical education lesson, expert and encouraging teaching meant that students with a wide range of abilities developed their skills very effectively. The teachers organised a game of 'boules' for two students who could not participate, so they too played a full part in the lesson, well supported by a teaching assistant.

The expertise of an 'Excellent Teacher' and a new member of the senior management team is developing a culture where good teaching practice is shared more effectively. Simple, effective ideas, such as students grading their understanding using a traffic light system in science, are improving some teachers' assessment skills.

Teachers who relate work to students' own lives usually keep lessons fast moving. In a few lower attaining groups teachers give students work that is too easy or fail to put the topic into context, so learning is slower. Teaching in personal, social and health education, citizenship, ICT and graphics is not as effective as it is in other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum has some good features but overall it is unsatisfactory. GCSE Latin and child development are worthwhile additions to the curriculum. In 2006 over half the students took GCSE French or German, which is positive. A few students in Years 7 to 9 struggle to study both languages so the school is rightly considering allowing them to study only one foreign language. Provision for literacy and numeracy has improved substantially since the last inspection and it is now good. In partnership with local colleges, the school provides vocational options, mainly for students in Years 10 and 11, but they are not enough to match all students' interests and abilities.

The school does not meet National Curriculum requirements for ICT in Year 11, an issue at the time of the last inspection. Too little time is allocated to English and mathematics in Years 7 to 9 and to science in all years so teachers struggle to cover the work.

The personal, social and health education programme has not been updated recently and lacks a focus on citizenship and environmental issues. Students report that they enjoy taking part in a range of extra-curricular activities, including trips, visits and out-of-school clubs. There are numerous sporting activities but few in music.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The thoughtful care provided for students is a strength of the school. Staff work very hard to ensure that students are happy and achieve. The support for vulnerable students is very strong, particularly exemplified by the care shown to students with physical needs by other students. Teamwork, nurturing and including everyone are central to the school's ethos.

The school has very good systems for ensuring students' health and safety. Regular, rigorous risk assessment and child protection procedures are in place although the

emphasis on safety has led to a reduction in school trips. Arrangements are in hand to retrain staff and to have more trips.

In the past, the quality of teachers' assessment and how they used the data varied between departments. The consistent analysis of students' performance across subjects, which is now well organised, means that students have realistic targets and the monitoring of their progress is good and improving.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The new headteacher, visiting the school several times before she took up post in September 2006, correctly evaluated what needs to be done to raise standards, particularly in subjects where the 2006 results were unsatisfactory. She has tackled weaknesses in the school's management and organised a new, effective senior leadership team. She is leading the school well, raising the morale of staff and giving them confidence in the school's future direction. Unsatisfactory teaching has been tackled and students' behaviour has improved. Most students confirm that the school 'feels better' and that their learning has improved.

Acknowledging the school's many strengths, some parents express concerns about the headteacher's strict stance on behaviour. Whilst disliking some aspects, students admit that behaviour needed to improve and say that things are calmer now. Staff have much confidence in the direction the headteacher is taking and morale is high. Leadership and management are most effective in English, mathematics, science, history and physical education. The checking of standards and the quality of teaching and learning are sound and getting better.

The headteacher is aware that the amount of time given to several subjects is too little. She has practical ideas about how to redress the balance during the present year. Her focus on broadening vocational choices for students is right. She has already met members of the local community to strengthen links to benefit students' education, and to make sure that the adult education facilities and the youth centre offer worthwhile and financially viable activities.

The experienced governing body has better access now to detailed information about the school. Governors are well informed, very supportive of the headteacher and carry out their responsibilities well. The governing body acknowledges that the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship. The chair of governors is sensitive to the need to balance National Curriculum requirements and choice for all students.

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Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	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	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, 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
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

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We much enjoyed meeting you and were impressed with the balanced way you discussed life at Robertsbridge. When you described aspects of the headteacher's firm approach to behaviour which concern you, you also acknowledged that it has actually been a good thing and the school is calmer. We think that your behaviour is good. The school is well led and managed and its overall effectiveness is satisfactory and improving.

Two years ago students achieved very well in their GCSEs and, with good leadership and management in place, there are good signs that standards are rising again. If you continue to work hard, as you did when we observed you in lessons, you will see your standards improving. The school is tackling the need to ensure that the amount of time to cover GCSE information and communication (ICT) courses is adequate. The GCSE science results need to improve to match those in English and mathematics. Standards in a few subjects, such as graphics, are not high enough. You are taught well and it was encouraging that one of you observed 'there's nothing wrong with the teachers'. We have discussed with them ways to make some of your lessons more varied and interesting.

In terms of caring for your welfare, the school serves you well. We listened to your views on the personal, social and health education programme. The headteacher shares your concerns and is determined to improve the course and how it is taught. Although the school council is back in action, you do not learn enough about citizenship or global issues.

We have asked the school to address the following things to make it better:

- Raise standards in graphics and ICT.
- Carry out a major review of the curriculum, including increasing the time given to some subjects and extending the range of vocational courses offered.
- Improve the content, teaching and resources for personal, social and health education, including citizenship.

I hope you all have a successful school year and that the Christmas celebrations are as good as in previous years.