

# Stewards School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115220
<b>Local Authority</b>	ESSEX
<b>Inspection number</b>	290169
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 April 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Stephen Abbott HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	954
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Jeff Tarling
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Rhonda Murthar
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	3 December 2001
<b>School address</b>	Parnall Road Harlow Essex CM18 7NQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 421951
<b>Fax number</b>	01279 435307

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors over two days.

## Description of the school

Stewards School gained science specialist status and became part of the Harlow Excellence Cluster in 2003. Since then the pupil numbers have grown making it an average sized school. It achieved the Sportsmark Award in 2004 and national Healthy Schools status in 2006.

Pupils come from a full range of abilities and socio-economic backgrounds but many are from less advantaged homes. On average, pupils are six months behind the expected level when they join the school, with a significant proportion being below average for their age and a smaller proportion being above average.

Nearly a quarter of pupils are eligible for free school meals. More than a quarter have recognised learning difficulties or disabilities, which is above average, as is the number who have statements of special educational need. A very small minority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language is lower than average. Very few pupils are at an early stage of speaking English.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Stewards School is a good school with outstanding features where every child matters a great deal. It is well led, has good capacity for further improvement and gives good value for money. The school serves an area where relatively few parents have experience of higher education and some pupils face substantial personal challenges. The school has an outstanding commitment to equal opportunities and to removing barriers to learning. Pupils and their parents speak very highly of the school. The curriculum is well constructed and is being revised to improve pupils' preparation for their future economic well being. The school's outstanding partnerships with other agencies ensure that pupils receive the support they need. Pupils achieve well as a result of the excellent care, guidance and support, allied to good teaching. Their progress is tracked carefully and prompt action is taken where necessary. Many pupils make slow progress initially because their literacy and numeracy skills are weak. Much has been achieved in increasing pupils' readiness to learn, helping them to understand assessment criteria and improving their examination technique. The proportion obtaining five grade C GCSEs or better is now in line with the national average, but some pupils have obtained the majority of their C+ grades in information and communication technology (ICT). Significant work has been undertaken in the last year to improve literacy and to raise achievement in mathematics to satisfactory, but standards of literacy and numeracy are still below average.

Pupils make excellent progress in their personal development and play a major role in the success of the school. They enjoy school immensely and understand how to stay healthy. Their behaviour and contribution to the wider community is excellent. They are committed to racial harmony and mutual tolerance. A peer mentoring scheme contributes to their feeling of safety. Within school many pupils take on responsibilities such as school council membership or prefect duties. More unusually, some act as pupil researchers, observing lessons to aid school improvement.

The senior leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and its areas for improvement. The inspection confirms their view but finds care and personal development to be outstanding rather than good. The school improvement plan provides very clear direction for the school. Monitoring and evaluation are good but evaluation is not always critical enough to identify ways to further improve areas of relative strength. Results analysis does not give enough attention to measures of achievement that put the school in a less favourable light. In addition, some evaluations of observed lessons lack the subject specific detail needed to identify how to achieve challenging targets such as increasing pupils' capacity for independent thinking and learning. The recommendations arising from departmental reviews are not consistently aligned with school improvement priorities or weaknesses identified by the review. The school's specialist status in science has enabled it to enhance facilities and cross-curricular activities. It provides teaching materials and training for science teachers in the locality.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Develop and sustain a consistent and rigorous approach to measuring the school's performance and refine the evaluation of lesson observation and other forms of monitoring to enable the fine tuning needed for further improvement.
- Improve standards of numeracy across the curriculum and further improve literacy skills to enable pupils to make good progress at an earlier stage.

- Improve achievement in mathematics by making better use of assessment in lessons to identify and address pupils' difficulties and misconceptions.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' achievement is good and improving. When their starting points and backgrounds are taken into account, Stewards School is among the top 20% of schools for the average progress made by its pupils from age 11 to 16. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 and good progress overall, particularly in English. A significant minority make slow progress at first until their literacy and numeracy skills improve enough for them to engage fully with the secondary curriculum. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities progress well because they receive effective support. Several boys and a few girls follow alternative programmes that meet their needs well but do not lead to GCSE or equivalent qualifications. Most of these pupils make significant progress in their personal development and in work-related learning.

Standards at age 14 are improving in line with the national trend but are still below average. By the time they leave the school, the proportion of pupils obtaining the equivalent of at least five GCSEs at grade C or above is in line with the national average. The figure was 53% in 2006, helped by success in an ICT course worth four GCSEs. However, below average results in mathematics meant that less than a quarter of pupils included both English and mathematics at grade C or above. There was a small increase to 40% in the proportion of pupils meeting the local college's entry criteria for more advanced courses.

Progress in lessons is good in most subjects and satisfactory in mathematics as improvement work begins to pay off. Standards in mathematics are improving from a low base, with 2006 GCSE results averaging nearly a grade better than 2005. Current pupils show further gains but standards remain below average.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils are excellent ambassadors for their school, reflecting their outstanding personal and social development. They are considerate and supportive of each other; are exceptionally courteous and helpful to visitors and they have good relationships with their teachers and other adults in the school. Their spiritual and moral development is good and they appreciate and are willing to celebrate the different cultures represented in Britain. Almost all pupils behave extremely well in lessons and around the school. They feel safe because they understand and support the measures the school takes to protect them from bullying and other dangers. Their enjoyment of school is exceptional, as shown by their good and improving attendance and the pride they take in their own and others' achievements. Pupils participate well in sporting activities and understand what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. The school has provided healthier options in the canteen at their request. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community. Very many take on posts of responsibility, as prefects, council representatives and mentors, and as members of the Ethnic Minority Pupil Voice Group. The school welcomes their opinions and acts upon their views. Pupils show enterprise and initiative in their response to local and national fund raising events. The self confidence, team working and problem solving skills they develop at school prepare them well for further education and the world of work.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and satisfactory in mathematics. The majority of lessons are good or outstanding. In these, teachers use assessment information to plan suitably challenging activities to meet the full range of learners' needs, choosing learning resources and activities well to interest and motivate pupils. Most teaching is clear and precise so that pupils make good progress. In the most effective lessons, teachers plan ways of assessing pupils' understanding and use probing questions to extend their thinking. Pupils are helped to assess their own and others' work so they know how to meet their targets. Some lessons allow pupils to develop independent learning skills or to apply and improve their literacy or numeracy skills but these features are inconsistent across subjects.

Satisfactory lessons often lack the variety of better lessons. Work can be too easy and the pace of learning is slower. Pupils are told what they are expected to learn but not always why. Teachers spend too long talking, giving themselves less opportunity to find out which pupils need extra help or further challenge. This reduces the quality of pupils' engagement and makes it hard to adapt lessons in response to their difficulties. Some marking also gives pupils insufficient guidance on improving their work. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The well constructed curriculum meets the various needs and interests of pupils well. The learning support unit helps many pupils overcome barriers to learning, such as emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been revised to help pupils with low levels of literacy or numeracy. Literacy initiatives have been successful though not all subjects have made the changes permanent. Numeracy remains a priority for improvement. In Key Stage 4 pupils can access a broad range of options, including courses at neighbouring institutions. Additional vocational options are being offered from September 2007 and the school is improving pupils' routes into post 16 education. Effective alternative courses such as 'Building Futures' and work based learning are provided through partnerships.

The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of activities, including a visit to New York for Year 11 pupils. There is an outstanding range of extra curricular clubs and 35% of pupils attend sports clubs. Good work related learning includes involvement in national enterprise week. Year 11 pupils write their curriculum vitae and are then interviewed by local business people.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 1**

Arrangements for pupils' care, guidance and support are outstanding. Staff show a strong commitment to promoting pupils' enjoyment, achievement and well-being. They work well together and with other agencies. Arrangements for safeguarding children are secure. Pupils know who to approach if they need help, and are confident that their concerns will be heard and acted upon. Pupils' progress and well being is carefully monitored and interventions are timely and appropriate. Pupils are well supported during transitions between key stages and receive good information, advice and guidance about careers and further education. Outstanding

support for vulnerable pupils, coordinated through a dedicated panel, enables many to exceed expectations in their academic progress and personal development. Above all, pupils are encouraged to be proud of themselves and their school, especially by the many high quality photographic displays around the school celebrating their achievements.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, governors and senior managers provide good leadership and direction. They have a clear vision for the school to develop and are rightly proud of pupils' excellent personal development. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school. Subject leadership is generally good and improving. Communications are good, and teachers feel well supported. The promotion of equal opportunities is outstanding. School leaders have created excellent support systems. The school wholeheartedly believes that every child matters and several pupils told the inspection team that they feel a part of a large family when at school. Governors have a valuable range of experience and expertise and challenge senior staff well.

The school has tackled the areas for improvement from the last inspection but recognises that literacy and numeracy and raising academic standards, especially in mathematics, remain priorities. Monitoring and evaluation are effective. Teachers are observed regularly to identify areas for improvement and professional development of staff is effectively based on this analysis. However, the evaluations made of lessons, performance data and the recommendations of departmental reviews are sometimes limited. They are not always specific enough in identifying how to address improvement plan priorities, such as improving pupils' depth of understanding and their independent thinking skills. Recruitment difficulties have hampered progress in some areas, but the school has made good use of the graduate trainee programme. In mathematics, the recruitment of an effective head of department and suitably qualified teachers has improved teaching and pupils' progress.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

### The quality of provision

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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
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

27 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Stewards School, Harlow, CM18 7NQ

I am writing to tell you the results of your school's inspection. Before I do that, I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your cooperation and help during our visit. Your views were important to us and your high regard for the school was very clear. None of the inspectors could remember a school where the pupils were so keen to tell them how good it was. We agree that Stewards School is a good school with outstanding features where every child matters a great deal. It is well led by Ms Murthar and her senior team. They and the governors have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and what it needs to improve.

We were most impressed with your maturity, excellent behaviour and willingness to accept responsibility in the school. We liked your commitment to racial harmony and tolerance of different cultures and views. We really liked the idea of having pupil researchers to observe lessons to help the school to improve. Some of you face many personal challenges but the school works exceptionally well with other organisations to help those of you in need and to make sure you all learn well. The curriculum is well designed to give you a good start in life. You achieve well because the teaching is good and the school tracks your progress carefully, ensuring prompt action is taken where necessary. Many of you need extra support with literacy and numeracy, and this is improving. The school has helped you understand the importance of education and has helped you to get better examination results.

We suggested some ways to make the school better. One is for teachers to check your understanding as you work, so they can deal straight away with any problems you are having. We have also recommended that the school tries even harder to help those of you who need to catch up on your literacy and numeracy skills. The last suggestion was for the school to take a more detailed and careful look at all aspects of its work to see how it can make good things even better.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector