



Roding Valley High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115235
Local Authority ESSEX
Inspection number 290174
Inspection dates 19–20 October 2006
Reporting inspector Stephen Abbott HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Alderton Hill
School category	Community		Loughton
Age range of pupils	11–16		Essex IG10 3JA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0208 508 1173
Number on roll (school)	1231	Fax number	0208 502 4992
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs S Wiseman
		Headteacher	Mr G S Mangan
Date of previous school inspection	25 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	19–20 October 2006	290174

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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

Roding Valley High School is a larger than average, non-selective performing arts specialist school, on the fringe of London. Most students are of White British heritage. The remainder come from a range of ethnic backgrounds and a small number of students are in the early stages of acquiring English. The numbers of students that are; eligible for free school meals, receive support for learning difficulties or disabilities, or have statements of special educational needs are below average. The older year groups joined the school with slightly below average standards, but there is an upward trend in attainment on entry, and the youngest year groups are just above the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Roding Valley High School is an effective and improving school, which offers good value for money. When the headteacher took over in 2004, he and the senior team identified ways to improve the school. They made changes which have improved the students' behaviour and their readiness to learn. The ethos of the school has been improved significantly so that students enjoy learning and achieve well. Students and parents agree that the education provided is good.

The orderly environment allows teachers to use more creative approaches to lessons, leading to good teaching and learning. In most lessons students are actively engaged and learn important life skills such as team work. Their academic potential and progress is recorded and effective support is provided to help them meet challenging targets. However, marking is inconsistent and does not always show students how to improve. Furthermore, teachers do not always use assessment information effectively to plan work that addresses the variety of needs found in each class.

The curriculum has recently been revised to include more vocational courses and largely meets students' needs, enabling them to enjoy learning, stay safe and achieve economic well being. The school uses its performing arts specialism to open students' eyes to the diversity of cultures and encourage their commitment to racial equality, thereby fostering outstanding social and cultural development. The good quality of care, support and guidance includes an outstanding Learning Support Unit, which is particularly effective for students who sometimes find it difficult to focus on learning.

The leadership, management and governance of the school are effective and self-evaluation is sound. The majority of the improvements recommended in the last inspection have been made. Much hard work underpins the rapid improvement and the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. It has good features, but the judgement reflects the school's continuing failure to meet statutory requirements for religious education. This issue has also tempered the judgements on curriculum and governance.

The school now needs to consolidate its gains by turning improvement initiatives into established routines, especially where they rely on particular individuals. The school's monitoring of some procedures is underdeveloped and its evaluation is not yet systematic and rigorous enough to provide the detail that will be needed to be to make further refinements to good practice.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend monitoring to include school procedures and evaluate the findings of more systematically and rigorously.
- Ensure that teachers use assessment consistently to:
 - o plan variations that meet the needs of different groups of students
 - o provide constructive comments when marking, that give students clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Ensure that statutory requirements for religious education are met.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good overall. The achievement of older students and boys has improved recently, although a minority of boys continue to give concern. Effective support enables students with learning difficulties and those with demanding personal circumstances to achieve well.

In their first three years, students make good progress and achieve well, particularly in mathematics, where they meet very challenging targets. Standards at age 14 have recently improved in English and science and are now above average in all core subjects.

Achievement in Years 10 and 11 has improved in the last year, with greater consistency across subjects. Teachers have worked very hard to reduce underachievement, particularly by boys. Well-focused strategies helped the school to secure its best ever GCSE results in 2006. Progress was particularly good in English and significant improvements were also seen in art, drama and music, meeting some of the specialist school targets. However, students' progress in GCSE mathematics was disappointing considering the very good results at age 14. Standards at age 16 are now just above the national average. Since standards were a little below average when older students joined the school, this represents good progress.

The recent curriculum changes are helping to consolidate these gains and to improve achievement further by ensuring that students follow courses suited to their needs. Students now make good progress in the majority of lessons, including most GCSE mathematics lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good and they enjoy their education at Roding Valley. They are good ambassadors for their school, being lively, articulate, polite and well-mannered. They appreciate the many opportunities given to them and the support they get from teachers. Participation in sport is good and the food options in the school dining room allow students to follow healthy lifestyles.

Students behave well, they show responsible attitudes as they move around and outside the buildings, helping to make the school a safe place to work and play. They make positive contributions to the school and local communities and develop satisfactory information technology, literacy and numeracy skills which provide a sound preparation for their future economic well-being. Their attendance is satisfactory and improving, but unauthorised absence is above average. The school has responded by asking parents to minimise holidays during term-time.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good overall. The performing arts make an outstanding contribution to the students' social and cultural development. However, students' knowledge and understanding of different faiths and beliefs is underdeveloped. A wide range of activities engages student enthusiasm,

energy, and imagination, raising awareness of racial equality and other moral issues. The citizenship and personal education curriculum contribute to good spiritual and moral development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are effective. Assessment and tracking procedures are generally secure with students knowing the present level of their work and the target level they are expected to reach. The school employs various strategies to improve teaching and learning and they are beginning to have a positive effect on standards. It has detailed records of each lesson observation, but the data collected in this way is not used systematically to evaluate improvement strategies or to identify further areas of development.

Most lessons are good and some are outstanding because teachers plan for the different learning needs of students and use a variety of approaches to motivate students, including a range of active learning methods. They manage the classroom well and use skilful questioning to challenge students' thinking and to develop their understanding. They sometimes involve students in their own learning, getting them to evaluate their own and each others' work. The best teaching also caters for the different learning styles of girls and boys.

The remaining lessons are nearly always satisfactory but the good features indicated above are not consistently present. Students think for themselves less and lessons do not recognise students' different starting points for learning. Marking is inconsistent and does not always show students how to improve. Similarly, teachers do not always use assessment information effectively to plan work that addresses the variety of needs found in each class.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory and improving, providing good opportunities for most learners to progress and perform well. There is a developing emphasis on performing arts in all years, reflecting the specialist status. However provision for religious education does not meet statutory requirements in Years 10 and 11.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced and students take a good range of creative arts, including drama. All students take a common core of subjects at Key Stage 4 and choose one of three curriculum pathways. The new Key Stage 4 curriculum includes a satisfactory range of academic subjects and a good range of vocational options, open to all students, including the performing arts and ICT. Satisfactory additional work-related courses and extended work experience for a few students are provided in partnership with other institutions. The early signs are that these better

meet the needs of less academic students and those at risk of disaffection. Some higher attaining students take GCSE mathematics in Year 10, progressing to additional mathematics.

There is an effective, well planned programme of personal and social education that includes citizenship and promotes students' awareness of health and safety. There are wide and varied opportunities for enrichment activities, particularly in the performing arts, with good levels of participation. The breadth of extra-curricular provision supports students well and adds considerable enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support for students are good with outstanding features. This is largely due to the high level of commitment of the pastoral teams and heads of school, their attention to detail and effective work with other agencies. A system of academic monitoring based on 'Roding Valley numbers' is well understood by students, parents and local primary schools. Subject leaders use a range of additional systems to monitor progress. The separate systems are individually effective but are not yet integrated to provide an integrated overview of each student's academic and personal profile.

The 'Behaviour for Learning' programme has significantly improved behaviour management. Vulnerable students are identified early and supported effectively. The Learning Support Unit has outstanding success in supporting and challenging students with specific emotional and behavioural problems. It reduces exclusions by building students' self esteem and confidence. The unit's innovative response to need, such as the 'SMART' thinking sessions, provides excellent coping strategies for students who struggle with school life and helps them to develop skills for the future.

Attendance is improving because of the collaboration between year teams and Local Authority support. Electronic registration permits managers to monitor the impact of incentives to boost students' attendance.

There are good systems to ensure students health and safety. Each student has access to a trusted member of staff who can be approached in times of difficulty. Students receive good careers guidance and effective links have been made with other organisations to promote the well-being of learners.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are effective. The head teacher's appointment, two and half years ago, followed a period of turbulence for the school. He successfully raised the morale of the staff and ensured that all were committed to the cause. He restructured the leadership team and worked with them to identify the priorities for improvement. Since then, effective action has been taken by leaders and managers to promote good behaviour and to improve teaching, learning and classroom discipline.

These actions have begun to raise standards and students are enjoying and achieving more consistently. Attendance is improving and fewer students are being excluded.

The school's self-evaluation incorporates the views of parents, and students. It is broadly accurate, and provides a sound basis for identifying the further improvements that can be made. Students' progress is monitored regularly to identify those who need support. The work of teachers is monitored and support provided to develop their skills through coaching and other opportunities to learn from the good practice of others. However, the evaluation of performance and the quality assurance of procedures are not always systematic.

The governing body is a strength of the school because governors have attended appropriate training, visit the school regularly and know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. As a result, the governing body has an excellent strategic overview of the school and provides effective challenge and guidance for the senior staff. However, governance cannot yet be said to be outstanding overall, because it has not ensured that religious education is provided for all in Years 10 and 11.

The additional resources accruing from specialist status have been used well. Accommodation is adequate but some corridors and a few teaching rooms are overcrowded. Safety is maintained by good management of student movement.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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?	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	3
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	2
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?	3
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	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

24 October 2006

Dear Students

Roding Valley High School, Alderton Hill, Loughton, Essex, IG10 3JA

Dear Students,

This letter is to tell you the results of your school's inspection. I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your co-operation and help during our visit. You told us how much you like your school and how supportive your teachers are. We enjoyed talking to you and appreciated your comments.

Your school has improved in the last two years and is now a good school. When Mr Mangan took over in 2004, he and the senior team worked out how to improve the school. They started by improving your behaviour and readiness to learn. The school is now an enjoyable place to learn and teach, encouraging your teachers to plan more exciting lessons. You are now offered better options in Key Stage 4. You all know about 'Roding Valley numbers' and they help you and your teachers to understand your targets. We were very impressed with the way the performing arts help you understand other cultures and to support racial equality. You receive good care, support and guidance and we saw that the Learning Support Unit gives really good help for those of you who sometimes find it difficult to concentrate on learning.

We asked the school to make sure that:

- all marking includes comments that show you how to improve
- every lesson includes some harder and some easier work, so everyone can work close to their own level
- every part of the school's work is looked at carefully each year by the senior staff, to see how it can be made better
- you are all taught RE in Years 10 and 11, because this is the law

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

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools