



Garston Manor School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117667
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290889
Inspection dates 7–8 February 2007
Reporting inspector Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Horseshoe Lane
School category	Community special		Garston, Watford
Age range of pupils	11–16		Hertfordshire WD25 7HR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01923 673757
Number on roll (school)	122	Fax number	01923 440344
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Paul Tozer
		Headteacher	Mrs Julie Lowman
Date of previous school inspection	17 June 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Garston Manor shares an attractive campus with three other mainstream schools on the outskirts of Watford. Pupils are transported to the school from a wide, mixed rural and urban catchment area in South Hertfordshire. The school provides for pupils with a statement of educational need for moderate learning difficulties, although an increasing number have more complex needs, including specific learning, autistic spectrum and emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. Their social backgrounds reflect the diverse nature of the surrounding area and the proportion entitled to free school meals is below average. Around 15% of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds and speak English as an additional language, although none require special support for this. There are twice as many boys as girls. A significant minority arrive in the school at Year 7, having transferred from mainstream primary settings. The school has had some staffing difficulties during the last year, and has been led by an acting senior management team since the previous headteacher moved to another school last Easter. There are well advanced plans to extend and improve the school buildings.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Garston Manor is a satisfactory school with a number of strong features. It provides good care, guidance and support for its pupils, so that many make impressive progress in their personal and social development, which is good. They consequently become happy, confident and responsible learners, well prepared for the next stage of their education and adult life. Parents appreciate this aspect of the school's work very much and feel that they are working in successful partnership with the staff. Pupils are very positive about their school and many feel that going there after earlier difficulties in other settings has turned their lives around. One pupil spoke for many when she expressed her gratitude by observing that 'I now feel good about myself and am getting on so much better than I was before'. All pupils make at least satisfactory progress across all subjects, from a low base when they arrive, and achieve satisfactory results in a range of accredited courses, including GCSE, at the end of their time in school. They achieve well in basic literacy, many making impressive progress with their reading and communication skills because of a whole school focus on developing them. Provision for practical subjects such as physical education, sport, art and design and design and technology is strong, helping pupils to achieve well in them. Target setting for pupils is inconsistent and does not properly involve pupils in their daily learning or in evaluating their own progress. When combined with the fact that the school is not using the assessment information it gathers to best effect in planning this learning, it cannot be sure that it is providing sufficient challenge, or that pupils are doing as well as they could. This is particularly so in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). Teaching is, therefore, satisfactory rather than good. Teachers and their assistants do, however, work very well together in successful partnerships across the school, ensuring that relationships between them and their pupils are very good, and that pupils learn in a friendly environment with well focused support. Together, they provide a satisfactory curriculum that has breadth and relevance. It is enriched by clubs, residential experiences and community activities that engage pupils' interest. Older pupils have the opportunity to take part in college courses and work experience, but, as the needs of the pupils change, the range is not yet sufficiently flexible or responsive to individual need.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school has taken effective steps to tackle most of the points identified for improvement since the last inspection, but insufficient progress has been made in relation to target setting. The new headteacher has a very clear vision for the school's future, which she has communicated well to her staff and governor colleagues. The school's view of itself is currently overly positive, but it does already know what requires improvement. There is a collective will to tackle those challenges and the school has a sound capacity to move forward, especially when the planned new senior management team is fully operational. It provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of information, particularly about teaching and learning, to inform planning by ensuring that all staff understand what constitutes effective teaching and good progress.
- Develop an effective system for setting challenging targets for pupils and assessing progress against them, involving pupils fully throughout.
- Develop a more flexible and responsive curriculum to meet the full range of need in the school, especially for older pupils, and incorporate mathematics and ICT more effectively across all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils arrive at the school with attainments well below national expectations. They make good progress in the basic skills of speaking, listening, reading, and social development. This enables them to gain satisfactory results, comparable with similar schools, in accredited examinations at the end of their time in school. Progress and achievement are good in science and practical subjects as a result of the strong provision that is made for them. However, achievement is only satisfactory in writing, mathematics and ICT, which are not so well taught across the school. By the time they leave school, pupils' standards are still well below national average. Most pupils reach the few targets they have, but the process is not undertaken with sufficient rigour to ensure that they are adequately challenged. Girls and boys and pupils with specific difficulties and different backgrounds all achieve equally.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school is rightly proud of its pupils' good personal development and well-being and it is very successful in enabling them, through a strong and positive ethos, to understand the importance of mutual support and respect. As a result, the school is a civilized and nurturing place, where good behaviour is expected and realised. Pupils understand very well the importance of staying safe and healthy and participate enthusiastically in all the sporting activities on offer. They are independently minded, know how to take responsibility and demonstrate good moral and social values. The active school council encourages pupils to express their views and opinions assertively, giving them a sense of partnership in the life of the school. When inspectors met with the council members, most said that friendship and teamwork were the things they liked best about school. This means that pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. In the school's industrious and purposeful atmosphere pupils show good attitudes to learning and the great majority are keen to do their best. Their spiritual and cultural sensitivities are well developed across the curriculum and they are taught to appreciate the needs and rights of others. They are consequently motivated to be active members of the community and fundraise to help those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils

develop satisfactory workplace and other skills in preparation for their life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in those subjects and aspects where strong knowledge and expertise helps pupils to do their best. The strengths of teaching lie in the quality of relationships between adults and pupils, the successful and effective teamwork between teachers and their able learning support assistants, and enthusiasm and commitment to do their best by the pupils. Pupils respond positively to this approach and engage well in most lessons. There are, however, some weaknesses in the way most teachers gather and use assessment information to gauge pupils' needs and progress, and plan the next steps in their learning. Consequently, lessons and activities are not always properly matched to pupils' capabilities, are not sufficiently challenging and sometimes cause pupils to disengage. This is particularly so for the highest and lowest attaining pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has a satisfactory curriculum that provides an exciting breadth of experience for its pupils, focusing particularly successfully on the physical, practical and social needs of its pupils. There are good facilities for practical subjects, but finds the cramped and worn conditions in many of its classrooms not always conducive to effective learning. The planned new build should alleviate some of these difficulties. Learning resources, including those for ICT, are adequate, but require further improvements to bring them up to an acceptable quality. Activities are well planned and generally take account of the varying needs of learners, using community facilities effectively and providing opportunities for pupils to engage and compete with their mainstream peers. As pupils move through the school they are provided with good, varied opportunities to attend local colleges and participate in work experience placements. However, the school recognises the need to ensure that numeracy and ICT are properly integrated across the curriculum and is conscious of a requirement to extend the range of opportunities available to meet the changing need of its pupil, to ensure that they are appropriately prepared for the next stage of their life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

A commitment to care and pastoral support is at the heart of the school's work and close attention to the personal needs of pupils is one of its strongest features. There are very secure child protection and safeguarding procedures in place and proper attention is paid to health and safety issues. Students say that they feel safe and

secure and that, if they have a problem or concern, they can talk to someone in the school and they will be helped. The school council has proved to be an important link between pupils and staff, and the impressive work that they have done together to deal with potential bullying is a concrete manifestation of this. The school has worked hard to ensure that its partnership with parents is open and productive and staff communicate regularly and effectively with them about their children's progress. Strong, collaborative links with other professionals and services, such as Connexions, provide very effective enhancement of the school's guidance. Pupils are not, however, properly involved in setting and reviewing their learning and personal development targets to inform individual planning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The acting senior leadership team has had to concentrate on the running of the school and management of some significant staffing difficulties in the interregnum since the last headteacher left. The recently appointed headteacher has worked well in effective partnership with her senior colleagues in these circumstances, but has only recently been in a position to give appropriate attention to longer term strategic planning. Despite these difficulties, the school's strong ethos of equal opportunities has been maintained through this unsettling period, because of the good partnership between all staff and the active and supportive governing body. New senior appointments will be in place in the near future and plans to further delegate responsibilities to subject leaders will then be possible.

The school does not have sufficient rigour or appropriate focus in its approach to monitoring and evaluating all aspects of its work, and does not involve all staff and governors as well as it could in this process of accountability. As a result, it has not accurately judged the quality of certain aspects of its work, for example the quality of teaching and learning and its curriculum.

Day to day management of the school and the budget is very efficiently supported by an able, recently appointed administrative team.

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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?	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?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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?	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	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?	3
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?	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	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	3
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

9 February 2007

Dear Pupils

Garston Manor School, Horseshoe Lane, Garston, Watford, Hertfordshire WD25 7HR

Thank you very much for the way you welcomed me and my colleagues to your school this week. We found you very confident, polite and friendly - and we were sorry that we could not see more of you on the second day, when the snow came and stopped you from coming in to school. Special thanks must go to the members of the school council who were very straightforward and helpful in telling us about your school

I am pleased to tell you that we agreed with you about the things that your school does well and some of those things that you would like to see improved.

The things we particularly liked were these:

- Your behaviour is good and you work hard in those lessons that interest you.
- The school cares for you all equally and looks after you very well.
- Teachers make sure that you do very well in reading and in learning how to discuss your ideas with other people.
- You do particularly well in PE, sports and practical subjects like art.
- You do well in your exams in Year 11 and are well prepared for leaving school and going on to college.

These are the things we have asked your headteacher and the governors to do to make your school even better:

- Help teachers to ensure that the information they gather about how you do your work is used to plan your lessons better.
- Involve you in setting your own targets and finding out how well you are meeting them.
- Make sure that you use your mathematics and ICT skills in all subjects.

We hope you will carry on enjoying your learning and helping your teachers to make your school such a happy place to be in.

Yours sincerely

Steven Parker

Lead inspector on behalf of the team.