

Millais School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126066
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	295503
Inspection dates	15–16 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Stephen Long HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	1489
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs E Barnes
Headteacher	Mr L Nettley
Date of previous school inspection	5–8 February 2001
School address	Depot Road Horsham West Sussex RH13 5HR
Telephone number	01403 254932
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. The inspection team evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, gathering evidence from lesson observations, discussions with staff and pupils as well as analysis of documents, performance data and responses to the parents' and carers' questionnaire issued in advance of the inspection.

Description of the school

Millais is a large school which has had specialist status for languages for some years and has recently gained specialist training school status. It holds an International Schools Award. The majority of its pupils come from the town of Horsham and are of White British origin, although the proportion from minority ethnic groups and speaking English as a second language is growing. Most pupils come from economically advantaged social circumstances and few are entitled to free school meals. Their attainment on entry is above the national average and a lower-than-average proportion has learning difficulties and disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Millais provides a good education for its pupils; it is improving and is outstanding in some respects. One's first impression of the school, of its polite and purposeful pupils within its eclectic, well-maintained buildings and tidy grounds, is of a nurturing environment for learning. Deeper investigation does not disappoint, bearing out the overwhelmingly positive views of parents and carers.

So what are the notable features of Millais? The pupils make good progress and standards are consistently well above the national average. Their personal development is excellent because of the quality of care and support they receive from the staff. The school seeks to include all pupils and to offer the kind of education they need. There are particular strengths in the school's specialist languages work and in its international dimension set alongside a relatively weaker vocational offer for less academic pupils. Teaching is good with some outstanding qualities and the majority of pupils enjoy learning. In some lessons, the needs of less able pupils and those with learning difficulties are not given enough consideration. The school is well led by the headteacher and his team, who are closely focused on improvement. This judgement is reinforced by a typical parent's view: "There is so much thinking going on about what the girls need and work put in to make it happen".

Pupils make good progress from the start of Key Stage 3 because transition from primary school is effective. Standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well above average. The large majority of pupils exceed the levels expected for their ages in Year 9 national tests. Although there have been some fluctuations in recent years, standards rose sharply in 2006 following effective action to improve teaching and the monitoring of pupils' progress. Pupils make good progress in the non-core curriculum and standards are very high.

In Years 10 and 11, good progress continues so that overall standards are well above the national average. For example, the proportion of pupils gaining at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including mathematics and English, has been very high and was rising until last year, when there was a slight decline. Standards are exceptional in a number of subjects, including mathematics, business studies, information and communication technology and English literature. However, there is some variation in achievement in different subjects. Progress has been slower, most notably in English language, where the pupils underachieved in the 2006 GCSE examination, but also in other subjects such as food technology, physical education and drama. As with the younger pupils, effective action by leaders and managers means current Year 11 pupils are on target to achieve challenging goals, including in English language, and to lessen the achievement gap between subjects.

While pupils make good progress overall, the strongest achievement is seen from the majority who occupy the middle and upper portions of the ability range. A high proportion of pupils are identified as gifted and talented and extra provision for them, as well as extension work in lessons, ensures they do well. Pupils with

statements of special educational needs also do well because of the high levels of support they receive. Less able pupils, including those with less severe learning difficulties, make slower progress because teachers' in-class support is not always good enough.

Pupils' excellent personal development contributes hugely to their academic achievement. They enjoy school and most attend regularly. Exclusions are low and reducing because of the effective support for vulnerable and at-risk pupils. Relationships between pupils are positive so that bullying is rare and the overwhelming view of pupils is that the school deals with it well. Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is outstanding because of well-planned personal, social, health and citizenship education together with opportunities across the curriculum to develop them as well-adjusted young people. As a result the majority have positive attitudes to learning and behave well, even when teaching is less inspiring. They are proud to be school councillors, eco representatives or prefects and raise considerable sums for charity. The school council has been instrumental in developing the school's new code of conduct and substantial numbers of pupils contribute to the school and wider community. Older pupils offer advice, care and trust to younger ones as peer mentors. Pupils recognise the importance of healthy, safe lifestyles and have influenced improvements in canteen food and access to water. They appreciate the numerous enrichment activities ranging from wrestling to the many educational trips locally and abroad. Participation in these is impressive, again demonstrating pupils' enthusiasm to capitalise on their opportunities. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives through work-related and enterprise activities, including running two companies within the school and opportunities such as applied languages courses at GCSE.

Teaching and learning are good. Some lessons are outstanding, although some teaching is less effective. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it to engage and challenge pupils through setting high expectations. Most lessons are well structured, behaviour is well managed and the purpose of learning made clear so that pupils understand how it builds on what they know. Teachers commonly use secure methods to assess progress during lessons, for example, asking probing questions. Some make excellent use of resources such as interactive whiteboards and explore how these extend learning rather than merely replace a blackboard. Information and communication technology is used increasingly well by pupils in different subjects, although this varies. Teaching is less effective in supporting lower-attaining pupils because, in some lessons, teachers do not plan well enough to meet their needs and keep them engaged. The school has refined its academic monitoring systems in all subjects to sharpen teachers' and pupils' awareness of how they are getting on. While many teachers use this information well to plan lessons, this is not always the case and, in part, this contributes to the weaker planning for less able pupils because teachers are not using all the information available. Pupils' awareness of their target levels or grades is good, with GCSE pupils being very clear about their next steps because teachers reinforce these messages. Younger pupils are less clear about what to do to meet their targets. Marking is regular. Most informs pupils as to how to improve, although some refers too little to levels or grades, missing the opportunity to show pupils if they are progressing towards their targets.

Some temporary classrooms are too cramped to offer ideal conditions for learning. The school works hard to counter this but does not have the financial capacity to replace them or the space to do without them.

The curriculum is well planned and reviewed to meet pupils' academic and social needs. The school's specialist status makes a strong contribution to the pupils' achievement and large numbers of them reach very high standards in a wide range of modern foreign languages. School targets have been met for pupils' achievement by the end of Year 9. Very challenging targets have been met at GCSE level in the numbers studying languages and pupils' achievement in some, but not all, languages studied. A wide range of languages is offered at GCSE level, including Italian, Japanese and Latin. The school's international work is an outstanding factor in pupils' cultural and social development. This is reflected in the International Schools Award and in projects such as 'The Horsham Olympiad' held in 2005, when 130 pupils from eight countries worked on joint projects, the legacy of which remains an important feature of the school's work. Links with partner schools have also been strengthened through the school's specialist status. Evidence of languages infuses the curriculum, for example, a display of the periodic table in Spanish. Millais pupils know they are at a specialist language school and value this. Conversely, vocational provision is more limited. Pupils have reasonable opportunities to study hairdressing, engineering and business in Years 10 and 11; however, the school is rightly widening choice for pupils through more vocationally related courses.

The care, guidance and support for pupils are outstanding. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are robust. The development of the Pupil Services Team is successfully centralising support for and securing a well-coordinated response to pupils' needs. Links with external agencies are excellent and are beneficial to pupils and parents. Pupils say they feel valued as individuals. The monitoring of pupils' broader social and personal development is genuinely innovative, including by involving the pupils themselves in building a personal record. Pupils appreciate study support opportunities and the excellent careers advice about the next stage of their education. These, together with work experience in Years 10 and 11, give pupils valuable insight into the world of work and help them make informed choices. Well-targeted programmes are provided for pupils with complex learning difficulties, including the 'Near to school' facility for the most vulnerable.

The headteacher and senior colleagues provide strong and innovative leadership. They have high expectations, developing a collegiate vision for the school. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The corrective actions taken when pupils' achievement has dipped, such as by improving pupil monitoring, teaching and academic leadership, testify to the school's good capacity for further improvement. Monitoring and evaluation give the school a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses by referring to a rich range of evidence, including lesson observations, data analysis and the views of pupils. The majority of parents also feel they are consulted about the school's work. The outcomes are used well to identify overall areas for improvement and to check the impact of the work done. The more rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress means the school is well placed to identify problems in

advance and take early remedial action. Management restructuring for this academic year has improved the focus on pupil achievement by grouping subjects together under curriculum directors and coordinating the work of academic and pastoral leaders. The newness of these arrangements, for example, in relation to subject leadership, means the capacity of curriculum directors to influence their areas is variable. While all have a clear view for what they want to achieve, curriculum development planning does not always clarify how whole-school or subject-specific improvements will be achieved or how the impact of actions taken will be gauged. The governing body provide good support and work very hard on behalf of the school. They refer to a good range of evidence in monitoring the school's work, are not afraid to challenge where necessary and have been central in the school's largely successful drive to raise standards since the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all teaching meets the needs of less able pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities.
- Include sharply focused and measurable targets in curriculum area development plans and show explicitly how these will be achieved.

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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
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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

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.



4 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Millais School, Depot Road, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5HR

This letter is to summarise the findings of the school's recent inspection and to thank you for your participation and for the directions to rooms on numerous occasions!

Our judgement is that Millais is a good school with some outstanding qualities. This mirrors the views of your parents and carers and the discussions we had with a good number of you. A particular strength of the school is your personal development and the care and support provided to you. We feel your positive attitudes to learning and your behaviour play a major role in why you do well in the different subjects you study. In part this is because you want to make the most of your time at school but also because the school supports you well and helps you to succeed. This means that you reach high standards and are well prepared for the next stage of your lives. Lessons are mostly good and some are excellent. However, there are some occasions where pupils who find learning more difficult do not get enough help in class and do not make enough progress. Being a specialist language school appears to suit Millais well and you reach high standards in your language learning. The headteacher leads the school well and, together with the staff as a whole, makes improvements where they are needed. Planned improvements in each subject area, such as improving teaching or changing the curriculum, are also well thought through but how the improvements are to be achieved or how they will be checked is not always clear enough.

Although Millais is a good school, I have asked the headteacher to include the following areas in the school's development plans:

- Improve the support given to pupils in class who find learning difficult, including those who have learning difficulties or disabilities, and for the pupils who find learning difficult to ask teachers for help in making progress.
- Show more clearly in the development plans for each subject how the planned improvements are to be made and how the teachers involved will know if the changes are working. You could also ask if you can give feedback to the school on what helps you learn the most.

Good luck for the future and especially to the Year 11 pupils taking examinations.

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector