

Erith School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101468
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307697
Inspection date	12 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Robin Hammerton 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	2018
6th form	263
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Friend
Headteacher	Mr T Hufford
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2004
School address	Avenue Road Erith DA8 3BN
Telephone number	01322 348231
Fax number	01322 351528

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector, with administrative support. Inspectors evaluated directly the overall effectiveness of the school, along with aspects of:

- teaching and learning
- the curriculum
- the sixth form (usually known in the school as 'post-16')
- child protection
- provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities (LDD)
- leadership and management
- pupils' achievement and their personal development and well-being.

Inspectors talked to staff, pupils and students, governors and the school improvement partner. They scrutinised school documents, parental questionnaires and students' work. They also observed the school at work, visiting lessons, assemblies and break times. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors considered the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, and found no evidence to suggest that these were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Erith School is a very large, popular and oversubscribed secondary school, which serves a neighbourhood containing some significant deprivation. It has specialist status in sport, mathematics and computing. It is a non-selective school within a selective area and consequently recruits fewer pupils of the highest academic ability than it otherwise might. Pupils' attainment on entry is mixed but well below the national average overall, with the proportion of pupils on the special educational needs register being high. The majority of pupils are White British, with nearly a fifth coming from other ethnic backgrounds. About one in every 10 pupils speaks English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Day by day, it significantly enhances the life chances of its pupils of all backgrounds and needs, and is rightly very highly regarded by parents and the local community. The pupils really enjoy coming to school; they are not completely uncritical but they recognise that their school truly cares for them and helps them make excellent progress. Every pupil matters and they know it.

What makes Erith School such a success story? First and foremost, it is the longstanding and excellent leadership provided by the headteacher, his senior staff, middle managers and the active and very astute governing body. Together, they have taken the school on a journey of continuous improvement, as successive inspections have shown. They show strong moral purpose, understand the local circumstances very well and are absolutely determined to seek the best for each pupil. Their vision is clear and compelling to others. They evaluate the school very honestly and accurately, involving many people in the process. There is no complacency whatsoever. Where improvements are needed, as recently in the teaching of science, robust but fair action is taken. School improvement plans are very clearly written and put into action diligently, so that they have a great impact and bring the school's vision to practical fruition.

The next element in the success of the school is the strong commitment and very hard work across the large staff team. As one pupil appreciatively said, 'There's a lot of work that goes into the school.' Staff respond very positively to the leadership they receive and are determined to do the best they can for all the pupils. They feel valued and appreciate the training, assistance and guidance they receive, as well as the trust that is shown in them. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning is outstanding in Years 7 to 11 and good at post-16. The school's rigorous and well-structured approach to staff performance management assures this. In lessons, pupils understand the teachers' input, are usually actively involved and know clearly what is expected of them, enabling them to make rapid progress. Pupils with LDD receive excellent and very well-managed support. Consequently, they make excellent progress and feel the school is a good place to be. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to this alongside teachers. Administrative and premises staff also fully share the school's vision and make a notable contribution to the school's success.

The third element is the excellent systems the school has developed over time. For example, pastoral support is excellent. Pupils feel very well cared for and know that there is always a trusted adult to approach if needed. Pupils and parents say that bullying is very rare but that if it does occur it is almost always dealt with quickly and effectively. Communications with parents are good, for example through the school's website. Child protection procedures are robust. Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is good and respectful as well as very safe. The consistent systems for behaviour management contribute much to this, as does the fact that pupils like school and want to abide by its rules. Attendance is improving as a result of concerted school action and is now above average. Pupils receive a high standard of impartial and helpful advice about their options and future careers. They also get very useful feedback on their work in lessons and through marking of their work, which the school has successfully developed. They benefit from the opportunity to mark their own and each other's work. Pupils are very appreciative of the many visits out, residential visits, extra-curricular activities and productions that take place. These help bring their learning to life and promote enjoyment, excellent learning about different cultures, good relationships and better understanding of work in class. The school's finances and resources are managed very carefully

and effectively and where large sums of money have been gained for significant projects, such as the new post-16 block, these have been used astutely and efficiently.

Strong partnerships with others are the final key component of the school's success. The school has formed close working relationships with other schools, colleges, community organisations, London Challenge, Excellence in Cities, some local authority departments and other public services. These enhance and broaden the experience for all pupils significantly and are often particularly valuable for those who are most vulnerable. The school's specialist status has brought significant improvements in the curriculum for physical education, mathematics and computing and the school has evidence that it has helped to raise standards more widely.

There are areas where further improvements would benefit the school and senior staff are aware of these. The curriculum at post-16 does not contain enough vocational or lower level courses to meet the needs of all students. In Key Stage 4, whilst there is a range of vocational options, a broader selection of these could benefit pupils. Although target setting is well-established and contributes effectively to raising standards, it does not take sufficient account of the progress of each individual pupil. Pupils generally know their targets, which raises their ambitions, but are not always sure what they need to do to achieve them.

In conclusion, what are the main positive outcomes pupils and students gain from attending this very impressive school? Most importantly, all groups of pupils, including those who are higher attaining, those who speak English as an additional language and those with LDD make excellent progress from when they start school to GCSE level. Boys make particularly fast progress. All pupils leave the school with some worthwhile qualifications and are very well prepared for their future lives. Standards are rising but remain broadly average, reflecting the non-selective intake. Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their readiness to be good and happy citizens of the future, are also outstanding overall.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form students like coming to school as they are 'treated like young adults' and because they enjoy their lessons. The post-16 block, opened this year, provides a good, modern environment in which to learn. This, together with the approachable and caring staff, makes students want to learn and succeed. The sixth form is well managed and, as for other year groups, the school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is excellent. There is good capacity to bring about further improvements.

Students enter the sixth form with a wide range of prior attainment. However, although the school works closely with other schools to provide an extensive range of courses there are too few suitable options for many lower attaining students. Once students are on appropriate courses, they make good progress and generally achieve well. Teaching is good. However, inspection evidence indicated that opportunities for active and independent learning are more limited than in the rest of the school.

Post-16 students are encouraged to play an active part in the life of the school as prefects and mentors for younger students and in raising money for charity. Some play an active part in the local youth council as well as the school council. Students receive excellent guidance and support. As well as supporting them to move into employment or further education, the school works hard to raise aspirations and encourage students. Several have recently gained good places at universities, including Cambridge.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more lower level courses in the sixth form and increase the range of vocational courses available from ages 14-19.
- Sharpen the target setting process by taking more note of each individual pupil's data, and enable each pupil to understand better what he or she needs to do to reach his or her targets.

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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	School Overall	16-19
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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?	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

2 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Erith School, Erith, DA8 3BN

As you know, we came to inspect your school just before Christmas. We managed to speak to quite a few of you and really enjoyed it. Thank you for your friendly welcome and also your honesty and confidence in telling us about your school.

We learned quickly that you think that you go to a really good school and are proud of it. That doesn't mean it is totally perfect (no school ever could be!) and some of you suggested useful improvements. However, you know that you are cared for very well and that Mr. Hufford, the governors and the staff really want the best for you. When we had looked at all the evidence, we decided that your school is outstanding, which is the highest grade we can give. It's a wonderful achievement for the school and you have all played your part.

We noticed how well you behave, how you look out for each other and how actively you get involved in your lessons. Well done! You get much excellent teaching and care which, along with your hard work, enables you all to make very fast progress. All of you leave the school with some useful qualifications. Standards are rising. You also learn very well the skills you will need to get on in future life, such as working well with other people and being safe. We were very pleased to see how much you enjoy your trips out, clubs, teams and school productions.

Of course, some things can still be done to make your excellent school even better. At post-16, there are not yet all the courses available to meet everyone's needs. In Years 10 and 11, running more vocational courses would also be helpful. Whilst most of you know your targets well, you're not always sure what you need to do to reach those targets, so we have asked the school to help you more with that.

I hope you will all really enjoy the fact that you go to an outstanding school. You are right to be proud.

With best wishes for the future

Robin Hammerton

Her Majesty's Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills