

Hall Mead School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102337
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	307973
Inspection date	12 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Rhona Seviour 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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	960
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J McKernan
Headteacher	Mr S London
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
School address	Marlborough Gardens Upminster RM14 1SF
Telephone number	01708 229655
Fax number	01708 220232

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; the strengths of the pupils' personal development and well-being and the school's care, guidance and support; and the effectiveness of the school's monitoring in improving practice and developing consistency in the quality of teaching and levels of achievement across subjects and key stages. Inspectors collected evidence from lesson observations conducted jointly with senior staff, assessment data, parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire, documentation and meetings with key staff, the chair of governors and pupils. Safeguarding records were also checked. Other aspects of the school's work were investigated in less detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Hall Mead School serves an urban area that is more socially and economically advantaged than most others, but with some pockets of relative deprivation. The proportion of adults in the area with experience of higher education is below average. The school has had specialist status in Technology and, in 2006, gained an additional specialism in languages. It is the only school in Havering with Leading Edge status, and is the lead school in the Havering Beacon Partnership, providing teacher training under the Graduate Training Programme. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and none is at an early stage of learning the English language. A small number of pupils are in care and the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. The school leads an innovative scheme that provides parents with the choice of foregoing their right to a Statement of Special Education Needs, so that the resources are diverted from administration to direct support. Following a lengthy period of absence by the previous post holder, a new headteacher took up post in January 2008. As a result, the school has had three headteachers since its last inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hall Mead is a good school with some outstanding and exemplary features. The school has a very clear sense of purpose and is highly successful in creating an inclusive environment in which all its pupils feel valued. Results in the GCSE examinations are exceptionally high and the care, guidance and support the school gives its pupils is exemplary. The harmonious school environment and the high quality of the relationships between staff and pupils, and amongst the pupils, provide a very secure foundation for successful learning and high achievement. The school is particularly effective at recognising the wider achievements of all its pupils. Pupils' personal development is outstanding because of the opportunities and encouragement they are given. Over two thirds of the parents responded to the inspection questionnaire and nearly all returns strongly endorsed all aspects of the school's work. This is a huge and exceptionally positive response and clearly indicates parents' confidence in and support of the school. Typical of many responses, one parent commented, 'We have always felt that Hall Mead School has encouraged our children to fulfil their potential, as well as allowing them to enjoy their school years in a secure and happy environment'.

The proportion of pupils achieving at least 5 A*-C grades at GCSE has remained well above the national average since the last inspection. In 2007, 82% of pupils achieved five or more grades A*-C and results in the vast majority of subjects were well above the national average. The proportion gaining A*-A grades was particularly high in English Literature, science, design and technology, music and applied information and communications technology (ICT). Nearly all the pupils achieved at least five grades A*-G and no pupils left the school having failed to achieve at least one GCSE pass. In contrast to the national trend, boys and girls do equally well.

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school has risen in the last two years and is now above average. The attainment on entry of pupils currently in Years 9, 10 and 11 was broadly average. Results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 are consistently above average in mathematics and science and, for the last two years, they have been average in English. The national data indicates that pupils make good progress during their five years at Hall Mead to achieve high standards in the GCSE examinations. As at the time of the last inspection, pupils make more rapid progress in Years 10 and 11 than during their first three years at the school. In particular, in Key Stage 3, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could in English. The school has begun to tackle this by giving greater emphasis to the development of pupils' writing and by the use of online learning materials. New leadership of the subject is imminent and the school knows that closer monitoring of pupils' progress and improvement in some teaching is also needed.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils play a very active part in the life of the school and their attendance is good. They thrive on the many responsibilities they have, for example, as health and safety representatives, school councillors or peer mentors. Their active involvement in the 'Kids Alive' charity increases their sensitivity to the needs of others and their awareness of different cultures. Incidents of bullying or racial harassment are rare and, when they occur, pupils trust their teachers to deal with them effectively. Pupils feel very secure in the school and know exactly what they need to do to keep themselves healthy. The high standards of their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills prepare them well for their future education, training or employment.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In lessons visited during the inspection, teachers demonstrated strong knowledge of their subject and examination requirements. They are ambitious for pupils to succeed and are prepared to go 'the extra mile' in order to help them do so. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons and around the school are exemplary. They are attentive, interested in learning and prepared to make the effort needed to achieve high standards. The school knows that it needs to improve aspects of its teaching. In particular, in some lessons pupils do not have enough opportunity to play an active part. Consequently, they become passive and do not develop the skills of independent learning. In addition, teachers' questioning does not always challenge pupils sufficiently to think deeply or critically enough. Pupils, too, feel that activities in some lessons could be more varied.

The good quality of the school's curriculum contributes to pupils' enjoyment of school life, their motivation and their achievement. Pupils enthuse about the excellent provision in physical education and technology, and the opportunities to begin GCSE studies in Year 8. Specialist status has enabled the school to provide an unusually broad technology curriculum, including fast track GCSE and vocationally related options in computer aided design and manufacturing and fashion in Years 10 and 11. Recent specialist status is fostering the development of a similarly broad languages curriculum, although pupils do not yet achieve as well in this area as they do in technology. Provision for pupils' personal development permeates the whole curriculum and is exemplary. This includes an exceptionally diverse range of activities, including house competitions, charity-related work, links with local and international communities and a plethora of visits, productions and concerts, all of which help pupils to develop as responsible, considerate and self-confident future citizens. The school has rightly identified the need to provide alternative pathways to GCSE that are better suited to some pupils.

The school is outstandingly successful at caring for and supporting its pupils. Through their responses to the inspection questionnaire and in discussion with inspectors, parents and pupils were full of praise for this aspect of the school's work. The pastoral system creates a sense of belonging and, because of rigorous attention to health and safety and to safeguarding the pupils, the school is a very safe place. The provision to support pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties and those who are vulnerable is exemplary and this accounts for the outstanding progress these pupils make during their time at Hall Mead. Inspectors received many comments from the parents of children with special needs, giving testimony to the work of the school. All pupils are encouraged to give of their best in all that they do. Pupils seen during the inspection were well aware of what they needed to do to meet the challenging targets they are set.

During the long-term absence of the previous headteacher, senior leaders, with the support of the governing body, successfully maintained the stability of the school and its high standards. The new headteacher is already passionate about the school's work and, in a short time, has gained an accurate understanding of its strengths and the areas it needs to improve, and has included these within a new plan for the future of the school.

Although some middle leadership is highly effective, the school knows that there is inconsistency. In the main, this is because some of the school's systems and procedures are not robust or rigorous enough. For example, there are no explicit or consistently understood expectations of what middle leaders should do to fulfil their responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision and teaching and learning within their area. This results in variability in practice and in the quality of the evaluations made by subject leaders. Although the school has challenging targets for pupils' attainment, it knows that there is inconsistency in the use of data on pupils' performance and the tracking of pupils' progress across subject departments.

As a result, the school has not always targeted its actions well enough to improve pupils' achievement. In particular, there has not been enough regular evaluation of the quality of teaching or its impact on learning, in order to identify precisely the aspects in need of improvement.

Specialist status has had an outstanding impact on the school's standards, curriculum and its resources, and stimulated an admirable array of links with local primary schools.

Governors know the school well and fulfil their 'critical friend' role effectively. Like pupils and parents, the chair of governors is very proud of the school's achievements, whilst also being perceptive about its immediate needs and future priorities. The new headteacher, together with the governing body and senior leadership team, provides the school with outstanding capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' progress in English in Key Stage 3 by ensuring that all teaching matches the quality of the best and that better use is made of data on pupils' performance.
- Sharpen the systems and procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

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

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	1
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 March 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hall Mead School, Upminster, RM14 1SF

I would like to thank you for the help you gave me and my colleague Keith Robinson, when we inspected your school recently. We both found it a very enjoyable experience.

As you may know, in a short inspection we concentrate on certain aspects of the school's work. In this case, we looked at your achievement and standards, your personal development and the school's care for you and on how well the school judges the quality of its work. Although we only spent a day at Hall Mead, we were very impressed by your enthusiasm for school life and your excellent behaviour. The response of your parents to our questionnaire was overwhelming. It is rare for us to receive so many responses, particularly given that Year 10 was on work experience. Both you and your parents told us how good you think the school is and we agree. Hall Mead is a good school and some aspects of its work are outstanding. During your time at the school, you achieve well, particularly in the GCSE examinations, and this is important if you are to be successful in the future. The care, guidance and support the school gives you are second to none. Your personal development is also outstanding because Hall Mead gives you so many opportunities to achieve and develop as responsible and self-confident young people. We agree with the school that there is a good curriculum. Technology status has certainly strengthened the school's work and raised standards, and the school hopes that its languages status will eventually make a similar impact. We also agree with the school that its teaching is good and, during our visits to lessons, we noticed how keen you are to do well. Most of you are very conscientious and want to contribute during lessons. Your teachers know their subjects and the exam requirements very well but we think that in some lessons there should be more opportunities for you to take an active part.

The school is led very well and, although still new to the school, Mr London knows exactly what it needs to do to become even better. We think that you should make better progress in English in Years 7, 8 and 9 and that the school should improve the way it judges the quality of its work. Hall Mead is an exceptionally strong community and we are sure the school will value your help to improve. We wish you all a very successful year and hope the summer examinations go well.

Yours sincerely

Rhona Seviour

Her Majesty's Inspector