

Mellow Lane School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102447
Local Authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	308011
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Linda McGill HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1134
6th form	214
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Scammell
Headteacher	Ms Marion Lewis
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2004
School address	Hewens Road Hayes UB4 8JP
Telephone number	020 8573 1039
Fax number	020 8813 7058

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Mellow Lane is a large secondary school. Many students stay on into the sixth form. The school serves an ethnically diverse community. The largest group of students is from a White British background. Students from Asian heritages form the second largest group. Many students speak a language other than English at home. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average, as is the proportion that the school has identified as having difficulties with their learning or behaviour. The school houses a resource base for students who have specific learning difficulties or communication difficulties. Although managed on a day-to-day basis by the school, the local authority is responsible for the provision. The school has specialist status for humanities. It has also achieved the 'Healthy Hillingdon' award and the Gold Artsmark Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to standards, achievement and attendance.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors have a realistic view of the school's current effectiveness. In order to improve as quickly as possible, they have placed raising standards at the centre of their work. They have sought, welcomed and acted upon guidance and support from the local authority and agencies such as London Challenge. Considerable efforts have been made to bring about improvements in key areas of the school's work, in order to raise standards and improve the students' achievement. The development of comprehensive systems for tracking the students' attainment and progress, a drive for better teaching, and changes to how students' behaviour is managed are central features. These strategies have led to improvements in teaching and learning, and have had a positive impact on standards and progress. The school now offers its students an acceptable standard of education. Senior staff and governors are confident that the results of forthcoming national tests and examinations will confirm that standards are rising. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 have been declining for some time. Results of national tests for fourteen-year-olds have been well below average in mathematics and science, and students have not made enough progress in these subjects since leaving primary school. Encouraging results in English last year showed that the students had the potential to do much better. GCSE results have also been exceptionally low. The proportion of students gaining five good passes at GCSE has dropped and the gap between the school's performance and the national average has widened. Students with learning or behavioural difficulties and those learning English as an additional language underperformed significantly, as did all other groups of students. However, there was a wide variation in results between subjects and in some, for example English literature, French and science, students did well. Now that the school makes more effective use of the information it collects about the students' attainment, teachers intervene more quickly to keep students on track and help them to make satisfactory progress towards their targets.

Teaching is generally satisfactory, and there is a secure core of good teaching on which to build. However, teachers are not yet equally skilled at applying the school's agreed approaches to teaching and to managing the students' behaviour. In most lessons, students are willing learners but they are not active seekers of knowledge. They are sometimes reluctant to take part in discussions, to answer questions at length or ask their own questions, and teachers do not often encourage them to do so. The school offers a broad curriculum with an appropriate mix of academic and vocational courses. Specialist status for humanities makes a reasonable contribution to the school's provision, especially in the sixth form.

Of the parents who returned their questionnaire, many were positive about Mellow Lane and the progress their children were making. A sizeable minority, however, had some concerns, mainly about the impact of unacceptable behaviour on learning in class. This inspection showed that the school's recent methods of dealing with unacceptable behaviour are leading to improvements, and interruptions to learning are fewer. The students' personal development

and well-being are generally satisfactory and are good in the sixth form. However, attendance rates are too low, entrenched for some students and show little sign of improving. The school has successfully reduced the number of students who do not go on to further education, employment or training. Nevertheless, low academic achievements restrict the students' future economic well-being.

The school cares satisfactorily for its students and has productive links with other agencies to secure their well-being. Academic guidance for students is developing well and is satisfactory.

Although the school has made headway in dealing with most of the issues raised at the last inspection, the fact that its overall effectiveness has declined means that insufficient progress has been made since that time. Some improvements have been made to the accommodation. Nevertheless, some of the school, indoors and out, is grim and not an inviting place in which to teach or learn. This leads to a lack of respect by some students for their environment. An unacceptable amount of litter is strewn around the outside areas at lunch and break times, for example.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Results for both AS and A-level examinations in 2007 varied considerably between subjects, and were below average overall. Students performed well in vocational courses. Many students join the sixth form with relatively modest attainment at GCSE level. Overall, their achievement is satisfactory, but some did less well than they should have, given their starting points. Positive action is being taken to boost achievement. Expectations of what students should achieve are higher and progress towards targets is carefully tracked. The school's data suggest that examination results at both AS and A level are in line to improve this year.

The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is satisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of both their subjects and their students. However, not all students are consistently challenged by their studies and taught the skills necessary to learn independently. A good range of academic and vocational courses meets students' needs well. Students have positive attitudes to learning, are keen to succeed and enjoy being in the sixth form. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, and students say their teachers and tutors support and guide them well. Most are able to fulfil their ambitions for the next stage in their education or career. Leadership and management are satisfactory because changes are too recent to have had a significant impact on standards. Students' personal development is a strength of the sixth form and most develop into mature and confident young people by the time they leave. Given students' satisfactory achievement and good attitudes, the sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve the students' achievement.
- Strive to improve attendance.
- Raise the quality of teaching to that of the best in order to enthuse the students about their learning.
- Improve the environment outdoors and in classrooms so that it provides a stimulating place in which to learn.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

In national tests at age 14, and at GCSE, students do less well than they should, given their starting points in Year 7. Last year saw a good improvement in English results at Key Stage 3, but standards in science and mathematics were very low. Students made excellent progress in English, but poor progress in science and mathematics. At the end of Key Stage 4, only a third of students gained five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, a very low proportion. The progress all students made between the ages of eleven and sixteen was very poor indeed. Robust action is being taken to remedy this. Information about the students' attainment and progress is used regularly to identify those in need of support to stay on track to meet their target grades. Well-targeted interventions and a sharper focus on revision skills are improving performance. In recent years, the school has fallen far short of its targets, even though they were realistic, given the students' prior attainment. The school's information shows that this year more students are making satisfactory progress and are on track to achieve what they should.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. The school's citizenship programme, linked to the specialist status in humanities, makes a sound contribution to developing students' understanding of the wider world.

Students say they enjoy school and feel safe there. They report that any incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively. They also say that, although not everyone behaves well all the time, behaviour is improving and disruptions to lessons are reducing. During the inspection, behaviour in lessons was generally acceptable and sometimes good. Students moved sensibly, if noisily, between lessons. Students understand the benefits of adopting healthy lifestyles but admit that they do not always choose healthy food. In contrast, many take part in the wide range of sporting activities the school offers. They willingly accept opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the school and the wider community, for example, by acting as mentors to others and raising funds for local and national charities. These positive features are marred, however, by the lack of respect that some show to their immediate environment.

Attendance levels have been low for many years. The range of measures the school has introduced has so far had a limited impact.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Senior staff have a realistic view of the quality of teaching. Their regular observations of lessons have helped them to identify what is working well and to provide appropriate support and

guidance to teachers to help them improve their practice. Lessons are generally well planned, and the best take full account of individual students' needs, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are in the early stages of learning English. However, the whole class sometimes has the same work to do and this is not sufficiently demanding for those who are more able. Teachers increasingly use technology well to illustrate teaching points and to spark the students' interest, such as in a lesson on Victorian times and the work of Dickens. Teachers often remind the students of the grades or levels they are working towards and classroom walls display the criteria for each one. However, displays rarely include students' work that illustrates what needs to be done in practical terms.

Students are usually compliant in lessons and get on willingly with their tasks. However, they tend to be passive recipients of information, reluctant to engage in discussion and debate. Too often, lessons are characterised by the teachers explaining to the class with few opportunities for the students to make other than short, closed responses. While progress is satisfactory, it is hindered because of this. Improvements have been made to the frequency and quality of marking and feedback to the students, but the link between marking and the lesson's objectives for learning or the students' targets is not consistently made. Students are not always told what they need to do next. Students are set homework, but it sometimes consists of completing worksheets started in the lesson, rather than an activity to consolidate and extend learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum has breadth and is enriched by field trips, educational visits, extra-curricular activities and visitors to the school. The school collaborates with other providers to offer vocational courses and work-related learning. It is proud of the provision it makes for construction, and hospitality and catering, which are particular strengths. The curriculum is being further enhanced in order to better reflect the students' needs and aspirations. For example, additional pathways into continuing education and training for students in Years 10 and 11 are being developed. For students in Years 7 and 8, there is an increased focus on literacy and the acquisition of functional skills.

The school's specialist status for humanities has led to improvements in the curriculum, for example the introduction of media studies in the sixth form and the range of additional activities and visits to extend and enhance learning. There are many interesting opportunities for out-of-hours activities, including drama, information and communication technology and sport. Most have a good take up and rugby is especially popular.

Provision for religious education has improved since the school was last inspected. The subject is taught as part of the wide-ranging citizenship programme but aspects of the statutory requirements are not fully met.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has secure processes and procedures to ensure that students' welfare needs are met and that they are safe in school. Good links with primary schools mean that particular needs are identified before students start in Year 7 and an induction programme eases transition

into the school. Students who have learning difficulties or who need help to manage their behaviour receive appropriate support. The school works productively with a wide range of external agencies. Despite the implementation of a number of strategies to improve attendance, the overall rate shows little sign of improving.

Academic guidance for students is developing well, in line with the increasingly accurate information that is held about students' attainment and progress. However, the use of targets is not yet well embedded; some students talk with much more confidence and knowledge than others about their targets and what they need to do to get there. Students are given appropriate guidance when choosing options for GCSE courses and in considering what to do after the age of 16.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

When the headteacher took up post 18 months ago, she quickly realised that urgent action was needed to make sure that all students reached the levels of which they were capable. Since then, she has worked successfully with the senior management team and middle managers to establish systems that enable weaknesses to be identified quickly and acted upon. She has established a culture of openness within the school and a sense of working to a common purpose. Self-evaluation is honest and accurate, and has led to significant positive changes. The school's improvement plan identifies the most important areas that need to be tackled. Targets are realistic, and increasingly challenging. In the drive for improvement, the school is successfully moving forward on a number of fronts, for example in improving the quality of teaching and learning and the students' behaviour. Efforts to raise attendance, however, have had limited success because the work is not sharply focused enough.

Governors support the school and play a part in reviewing its performance and determining the way forward. However, the challenge that they offer has not been robust enough.

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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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Mellow Lane School, Hayes, UB4 8JP

I am writing to let you know the findings of the inspection that took place at your school recently. First, I would like to thank you for making us welcome and for talking to us about your views of Mellow Lane. What you told us formed an important part of the evidence that we gathered in order to make judgements.

Your school offers you an acceptable standard of education, but its work is not yet good enough. This is because, over the past few years, test and examination results have been too low and students have not made enough progress. Attendance is also far too low. We have therefore given the school a notice to improve. An inspector will visit the school in about six months to check that the action your headteacher and other staff are already taking is continuing to have a positive impact.

We recognised several strengths in Mellow Lane's work. Students make better progress in the sixth form and they are given good support, which equips them well for when they leave. Behaviour is improving and, in lessons, you usually work well. Most of you enjoy school. Importantly, your headteacher and the senior team and governors have a clear picture of what needs to be improved and are working hard to do this.

We have advised them to focus on four main areas:

- raising standards and improving your achievements
- making sure all teaching is at least good so that you become enthusiastic about learning
- improving attendance
- improving the buildings and grounds.

You need to play your part in this. Support your teachers by coming to school and taking a more active part in lessons. The playground is about to be equipped with new litter bins. Help to make the environment more attractive by using them, and by treating the school buildings and grounds with respect as they are refurbished.

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill

Her Majesty's Inspector