

Ravenscliffe High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107588
Local Authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	309439
Inspection dates	23–24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Kath Halifax

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	123
6th form	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Dave Peck
Headteacher	Mr Michael Hirst
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Skircoat Green Halifax West Yorkshire HX3 0RZ
Telephone number	01422 358621
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The school caters for a very wide range of needs. All students have a statement of special educational need to meet their moderate, severe, profound or complex difficulties. Almost all are of White British heritage with a small number of students from Pakistani or mixed race backgrounds. Nine students are in the care of the local authority.

The school was awarded specialist sports status in September 2007 and has gained the Healthy Schools, Sportsmark, Safemark and Artsmark Gold Awards. It has also achieved the ECO Schools Green Flag. The senior management team has been reorganised to reflect the school's sport status. The headteacher has taken on the additional role of director of sport and the deputy has become the partner headteacher, sharing responsibility for day to day matters. An assistant headteacher completes the team.

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. It is because of the excellent leadership and management that parents, carers, students and other professionals hold this school in high esteem. Comments such as 'All the children are treated as individuals in spite of their disabilities. Each has goals which, although seem insignificant to the outside world, are milestones in their development. I am delighted with every aspect of the school' echo the thoughts of parents and carers. It is a measure of the school's effectiveness that they, alongside health and other professionals feel driven to make written comments about the quality of the school.

Ravenscliffe provides extremely good value for money not just for the students in its care, but also for other schools and the local community. Its specialist sport status is already having an impact. For example, specially adapted cycles and cycle tracks, after school clubs, 'taster days' for primary aged pupils, and numerous sporting opportunities contribute to the skills, health and well-being of children from the age of six months to adults. In addition, creative links encourage 'green exercise' through horticulture and conservation work at Ogden Water, or when rambling along the Calderdale Way.

Achievement is outstanding for students of all capabilities, though standards are very low, compared to mainstream schools, because of students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. An excellent curriculum results in rounded students. Although a specialist sports college, equal emphasis is placed on communication and the creative arts. Students are justifiably proud of their signing choir, dancers and musicians. Equally, excellent provision in the sixth form, focused on gaining credible qualifications whilst taking part in numerous enterprise projects prepares the young people exceptionally well for the next stage of their lives.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. As a result, students make remarkable gains in their awareness, and in the knowledge and skills they acquire. Teachers, support staff and health professionals are skilled and work very effectively as teams. Tracking achievement and recording progress are used effectively to plan further work. On occasions, students are so busy they do not always find time to complete written evaluations of what they have learned.

Outstanding care, support and guidance alongside exceptional provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development allows them to make excellent gains in their personal development. Of exceptional quality is the nationally recognised independent travel programme. Students say this is 'lots of good fun' and 'means I can do things without my mum and dad having to be there'. Students are happy, well-balanced, mature young people. They benefit physically and socially from the extremely wide range of sports and residential experiences. All demonstrate enthusiasm and delight at the activities provided. This is especially evident in the sheer joy on faces of some students, who, despite their frail condition, threw themselves wholeheartedly into wheelchair abseiling during their residential experience.

Leaders and governors have not rested on their laurels following the previous very good inspection report. They are very clear about why they are so successful. They continuously challenge what they offer and are visionary in their plans for the future. Their capacity to continue to improve the school is excellent. Self-evaluation is accurate, though managers are modest in some of their judgements.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Achievement is excellent for students of all capabilities. Skilled teaching and an outstanding programme enable students to acquire the skills and confidence necessary for adult life. Students confidently undertake community 'Springboard' placements in shops, cafes and offices learning about the world of work. Skills learned are then transferred to a number of enterprise projects in school including catering, ceramics and horticulture. This has helped students achieve their high aspirations in, for example, paid employment and courses in horticulture. Students achieve national qualifications in a range of subjects with all of the 2007 leavers attaining the challenging entry level certificate in at least one subject. Leadership is very effective in monitoring and improving what is on offer. The introduction of the sport leader qualification and media studies allow students to make valuable contributions to the school and wider community. Socially, students were positively animated when recounting their experiences at the first ever 'Prom'. Similarly parents were visibly moved commenting, for example, 'I never thought my daughter would be able to experience such a sophisticated occasion and show such poise, style and confidence'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that students have sufficient time to record their thoughts at the end of each unit of work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

All students, including the small number from ethnic minority groups, make considerable gains because adults have high expectations and challenge them to 'be the best'. This is particularly evident in the daily communication sessions. Expert teaching in small groups has resulted in enhanced progress for all. Students with profound needs, for example, look at who is speaking and make sounds because adults provide activities to encourage them to vocalise, and have the patience to wait for a response. Equally, higher-attaining students make sensible contributions to discussions, instigate conversations and make very good improvement in their writing through the acquisition of an extended vocabulary. Similar progress is made in other subjects. Sensitive work with, and excellent support for, students with degenerative conditions enables them to maintain some of their skills and have a quality of life. Students who have a gift or talent are identified and encouraged to join school and community groups to further their talents.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students are extremely well behaved and considerate of others. They are eager to learn and desperate to demonstrate their knowledge both in lessons and to visitors. Attendance is good. Students are especially proud of their conservation work and link this to what they like or dislike in their neighbourhood. Work in the school grounds gained students a gold medal in the Yorkshire in Bloom competition. Substantial amounts are raised for charity each year and

higher-attaining students express an opinion about Fair Trade. Students' spiritual development is extraordinary. Even those with the most severe difficulties are delighted with the achievements of their classmates be it when making eye contact for the first time, or helping a fellow student. Students follow the good example set by all adults, including the school chaplain. Respect is shown to all faiths with, for example, students supporting their Muslim friends who were fasting for Ramadan. Members of the school council and those representing the school on the Disability Youth Forum take their roles seriously. They have been instrumental in a number of changes to school life including lunchtime arrangements and the specially adapted cycles.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students learn at an exceptional rate because adults have a very good understanding of students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This combined with confident subject knowledge enables staff to provide for individual learning styles. Though progress is in very small steps, students with profound needs learn at a considerable rate because the use of real objects makes learning meaningful. Similarly, students with autistic spectrum disorder do very well through a structured approach and the use of a picture exchange system. Those who are higher attainers are challenged by the activities provided, with some of them working independently. Teachers use a number of methods to record students' achievement and track their progress. While some students record their evaluation of a unit of work in a suitable way, this is not done consistently and so limits their ability to take responsibility for their learning. Teamwork between staff is a strong feature of all lessons. The practice of keeping the same support assistant with groups while they move to different subjects allows students to be confident learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The excellent curriculum is reflected in students' achievements and in the number of external awards the school has earned. An incredible range of activities and clubs covers all aspects of the curriculum. Most students over the age of 14 confidently chose the courses they will follow. Students report that days such as 'Fantastic Friday' and producing the 'Starship Enterprise' magazine are tremendous fun and 'don't really seem like work'. Students of all capabilities especially enjoy sport, saying how it helps keep them healthy. Through the sport college links, students improve their physical and social skills because of weekly visits to partner schools, for example for trampolining or golf. Equally of value, students with learning difficulties in partner schools use Ravenscliffe independent travel programme and garden to aid their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The schools' excellent transition programme for pupils transferring from the primary schools enables students to settle quickly and confidently into their secondary school career. The health and well-being of students and staff is a prime concern of leaders. Rigorous procedures are in

place to protect and safeguard all students. The assessment of potential risks is of a high quality. Very good support is provided for students and families who are at the early stage of learning English. Equally, the pastoral system in school ensures that those who are looked after by the local authority achieve as well as others in their class. Staff appreciate the contribution of parents, carers and other professionals to students' learning and well-being. Regular workshops on topics such as managing behaviour enable families and school to use the same approach.

The compilation of DVDs containing video evidence of significant milestones and magical moments provides parents and carers with a treasured record of each student's school career.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

It is the passion and skill of leadership at all levels that has brought about remarkable progress since the last inspection. This contributes to the well-being and academic development of students and staff alike. The combined skills of the headteacher and the partner headteacher are instrumental in maintaining a sense of common purpose and an atmosphere where all students enjoy learning. The detailed tracking of students' achievements and progress by the assistant headteacher is driving up standards and raising achievement. Furthermore, they provide excellent examples as classroom practitioners for their colleagues. Equally, the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning by key stage managers and subject leaders has identified where support has been needed. The decision to appoint a learning mentor for pastoral care has allowed key stage leaders to focus more on enhancing teaching and learning. Governors are dynamic and fulfil their role in supporting the school whilst holding it to account. They are imaginative in their thinking, for example creating a dance and music studio, and supporting the development of the 'Next Step' provision for students when they leave school.

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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	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	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	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	1	
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?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
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	1
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	1	
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	
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

Inspection of Ravenscliffe High School and Sports College, Halifax,
HX3 0RZ

As you know, I recently spent two days at school looking at your work and talking to your teachers. Thank you for helping me, and a special thanks to the sixth formers who cooked my delicious lunches. What an amazing time I had! I'm sorry I didn't have time to see all the exciting things you do. I want to let you know that Ravenscliffe is an outstanding school that prepares you exceptionally well for your future. These are some of the areas that are particularly successful.

- Your headteacher, senior teachers and governors are very good managers and have been imaginative in the way they have improved the school since the last inspection.
- The teachers and support assistants work especially hard to make lessons interesting, exciting and designed to make you think so you make remarkable progress.
- The excellent curriculum gives you opportunities to take part in sport, singing, music and numerous other thrilling activities.
- You do some first-rate work with other schools and the community, helping improve their participation in sport, horticulture and many other activities.
- Your achievement is outstanding so by the time you leave the sixth form you have gained qualifications and are extremely well prepared for life after school.
- Very good links between teachers, health workers and your families ensure that you are extremely well supported and become more independent.
- The very wide range of sporting activities contributes significantly to your health, well-being and personal development.

I know you are very busy with all that is happening in school, but I have asked your teachers to make sure you record your thoughts at the end of each unit of work and I am sure you will remind them if they forget! I wish you well for the future.