

Ralph Thoresby School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108075
Local Authority	Leeds
Inspection number	309590
Inspection dates	2–3 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Jan Bennett 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1013
6th form	152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr William Flynn
Headteacher	Mr Stuart Hemingway
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2004
School address	Holt Park Holtdale Approach Leeds West Yorkshire LS16 7RQ
Telephone number	0113 336 8181
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Ralph Thoresby is an average-sized secondary school to the north-west of Leeds. Most of its students are from areas of relative affluence but a minority are from areas of the city that experience social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average and rising. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is just above average and the proportion of students for whom English is not their first language is also slightly higher than average and rising. A lower than average proportion of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities but a high proportion of students have a statement of special educational needs. There is a 'care suite' on site catering for 30 young people with physical disabilities and visual impairment. In September 2007 the school moved into a new building which also houses a community theatre and library. The school has had specialist performing arts status since 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Ralph Thoresby is a satisfactory and improving school. The school has moved forward following the appointment of a new headteacher last summer, with parents, teachers and students recognising and appreciating the range of improvements that he has put in place this year.

The school has experienced declining standards and achievement in the past. But the headteacher, supported by governors and managers, has accurately identified the issues that needed to be addressed and implemented a successful plan of action that is moving the school forward.

The quality of teaching was recognised as a priority area for improvement and an intensive programme of training and support was introduced. Lesson observations, carried out by external consultants and the school's managers, show that teaching is improving and the number of unsatisfactory lessons has been considerably reduced; none were seen during the inspection. Whilst there are examples of good and outstanding practice, there is still insufficient good teaching overall. In many of the less effective lessons, lower achieving students are not sufficiently challenged or the pace of the lesson is not appropriate to their individual needs.

More vocational courses have been introduced and they are enabling students to make better progress. A new tracking system has been established making it possible for teachers and managers to monitor individual students' progress closely and provide support quickly if necessary. The evidence from the internal tracking data, modular examination results and mock examinations suggests that standards reached in national examinations will be higher this year, reversing the downward trend. Students are making satisfactory or better progress in lessons and internal data suggest that achievement is also improving.

The personal care and support that students receive, especially students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is good but academic guidance is still being developed and is satisfactory. Students treat each other with respect and they take care of one another - even the most vulnerable students say that they feel safe in school. Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory.

Partnership working has improved and is good. The school works well with local schools and colleges to offer students a broader curriculum. Links with the community, through the specialist arts status, are strong but the school is not yet making the best use of its specialist status within school.

The management team is energetic, capable and focused on improvement. The new headteacher has restructured the senior leadership team and given managers, at all levels, more responsibility. Resources are carefully managed, the school no longer has a budget deficit and it is providing satisfactory value for money. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve. Managers at all levels have a realistic view of the school's current position and they are clear about plans for further development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school works in partnership with three other local high schools to offer students a good choice of subjects but valuable teaching time is being lost due to travel between sites. The schools are reviewing timetabling arrangements in order to address this and meanwhile teachers

are providing extra support outside of lessons to compensate. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is average and they attain broadly average standards; performance at A level is better than at AS. Achievement declined in 2007 and there is wide variation between subjects but internal data and modular results suggest an improvement this year. The personal development of students is good. Sixth formers enjoy their learning and appreciate the very positive relationships they have with staff. Attendance in the sixth form has improved. Sixth formers contribute well to the life of the school and the community. They provide peer and in-class support for younger students and play an active role in community events. Sixth formers appreciate the guidance and support they receive. They have regular one-to-one sessions with their tutor to discuss the progress they are making against individual subject targets and they receive good advice when considering subject and career options. Leadership and management of the sixth form have been strengthened recently, plans for strengthening the provision have been implemented and developments are underway.

What the school should do to improve further

- Secure the improvement in achievement across all key stages.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching.
- Match the teaching of lower achieving students more closely to their individual needs.
- Increase the impact of the specialist status within the school.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the school with average prior attainment and the standards they reach at the end of Key Stage 4 are broadly average but there has been a steady overall decline in standards over the last few years. However, the proportion of students leaving school with five or more high grade passes at GCSE, including mathematics and English, has remained at the national average for the last few years. On the contrary, the proportion of students getting five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to G has declined and was significantly below average in 2007. Much work has been done to ensure that lower achieving students in the current Year 11 have every opportunity to gain qualifications and mock examination results suggest a considerable improvement this year. Standards reached at the end of Key Stage 3 declined in 2007, particularly in English. Practice tests indicate that results in national tests this year will be better in all three core subjects but the improvement in science is less marked than in English and mathematics. Specialist school targets have been met except in dance and even in this subject there has been a significant improvement in 2006–2007.

Achievement has declined over the last few years but the school is tackling the underlying issues. Students were making satisfactory or better progress in all the lessons observed on inspection. Students are set challenging individual targets that are carefully monitored and tracking data show that achievement is improving. More vocational courses have been introduced in Key Stage 4 and Year 10 students following the new courses are making good progress. Students with statements of special educational needs are achieving in line with their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Moral, social and cultural development is strong but spiritual development is satisfactory. Students are considerate, take good care of each other and value each other's differences. Students' enjoyment of learning is satisfactory overall and varies with the quality of teaching. Behaviour in lessons and around school is satisfactory but the number of exclusions is too high, particularly amongst minority ethnic students. However, the school is involved in the national pilot to reduce exclusions among Black and ethnic minority students. Attendance is satisfactory. Students say that they feel safe and report that there are few instances of bullying; those that occur are swiftly dealt with. Students are well informed about choices in relation to their health and they are making healthy choices with regard to eating and to physical activity. Students are involved in a full range of activities with the community as part of the specialist arts status. Fundraising is well developed and a wide range of charities benefit, including a local children's hospice and a charity in Malawi. Students are prepared effectively for life after school through their involvement with the wider community, opportunities to take on responsibility in school, particularly as peer mentors and work experience. However, the school and year councils are not sufficiently well developed to ensure students can make their voices fully heard.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Relationships between teachers and students are good; the aims of the lesson are made clear at the start; and a variety of activities and resources is used to appeal to different types of learners. In the best lessons, the pace is well judged and teachers check learning throughout the lesson using good questioning techniques. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own learning and know what they must do to take their work to a higher level. In a few lessons, particularly for low achieving students, either insufficient time is allowed to consolidate learning or students are engaged in routine tasks that are insufficiently challenging. Teaching assistants are deployed well in most lessons. The school is making increasing use of assessment to support learning and many students talk confidently about their target grades and how they are progressing. Nonetheless, the quality of marking is still too variable. There are examples of peer assessment being used very well in lessons, but this is yet to be fully embedded across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. The school is working hard to tailor the curriculum more closely to students' needs in all key stages. The introduction of a 'learning to learn' course in Year 7 is successfully developing thinking skills that are being applied across the curriculum. More vocational courses are offered in Key Stage 4 and they are motivating students to work harder and achieve. Students attending courses at local colleges

or with training providers have more opportunities to gain accreditation for their learning this year including opportunities to gain qualifications in mathematics, English and science. By working collaboratively, the school is able to offer more vocational courses in the sixth form, particularly at intermediate level. Arrangements for work-related learning have improved this year and are contributing well to students' future economic well-being. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities especially in the arts that enrich students' learning and provide opportunities for them to enter the world of performing arts. The curriculum is still developing and is moving towards more personalized learning but the opportunity for high achieving students to take qualifications early is, as yet, limited to mathematics. Curriculum provision and planning for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall with some good features. Care for the most vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly good. Students with additional needs are supported by a good range of well planned programmes that provide them with a safe supportive learning environment. Their support is securely underpinned by extensive links to outside support agencies and high quality work with parents. Child protection arrangements are well established and safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Health and safety arrangements, including risk assessments, are good. The school is aware of the need to continue to reduce the number of absences and has put in place a series of good initiatives to address this. Arrangements for the transition of primary pupils into Year 7 are good. Academic guidance is satisfactory but needs further development. Effective procedures to monitor students' progress towards their targets are in place throughout the school. Students are increasingly aware of how well they are doing and this information is shared with parents. However, tutorial time in the main school is not always used well and opportunities to provide academic guidance and support are missed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory and improving. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school that is shared by staff and governors.

Leaders and managers are fully aware of the challenges that face them and they are prioritising well. New systems for self-evaluation and development planning were introduced at the start of the academic year. They are becoming embedded and are starting to have an impact. The self-evaluation report is accurate and the school's development plan is clearly prioritised and regularly monitored. Performance management has been strengthened and there are closer links between lesson observations, staff training and the review of performance. The data gathered from the system for tracking students' progress is not yet being used when assessing the performance of staff. Partnerships and collaborative working are strong. Stakeholders are already consulted and the school is improving systems for collecting their views. Most parents are supportive of the school. Governance is satisfactory and improving. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and individual governors are building links with

curriculum areas. The committee structure has been reviewed to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Governors are very supportive of managers but they are also increasingly holding them to account.

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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?	3	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

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

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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

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	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

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	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
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?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Ralph Thoresby School, Leeds, LS16 7RQ

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of the school. We enjoyed meeting you, seeing you at work and hearing your views. We would particularly like to thank those of you who took the time to speak to us in lessons, around school and in meetings.

Here is a summary of our findings which we hope will be of interest to you.

- We were delighted to see that your mock SATs and modular GCE results show that standards in national tests and examinations will be better this year. However, there is still room for improvement and we are asking your teachers to make sure that achievement continues to improve in future years.
- The school is very inclusive and we were impressed with the way that you show respect and consideration for each another, both in lessons and around school. The care and personal support that you receive is good. We were happy to see that many of you help to raise money for charities and we were particularly impressed with the active part that sixth formers play in the life of the school.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. There are pockets of good practice and we have asked the school to make sure that the proportion of good teaching increases. We noticed that the pace of lessons was not always right for some of you. We saw lessons that moved too quickly from one activity to the next allowing you insufficient time to consolidate your learning and we saw other lessons where the work was too easy. We are asking teachers to take a careful look at this.
- We were pleased to see that more vocational courses have been introduced, especially in Key Stage 4, and we were impressed with the work that the school does in partnership with local colleges and schools to broaden the curriculum. The specialist arts status is used well in the community and many of you play an active role in this. We think, however, that the school could make better use of the specialism to improve learning and achievement in school.
- We recognise and applaud the many improvements that Mr Hemingway has made since he became headteacher. He, the governors and managers know the school well and they are fully aware of what they need to do to improve the school further.

We hope that you will continue to play your part in improving the school and wish you well for the future.