

Ralph Allen School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109305
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	309955
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Tom Winskill HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1091
6th form	215
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frances Tyson
Headteacher	Libby Lee
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2004
School address	Claverton Down Road Combe Down Bath BA2 7AD
Telephone number	01225 832936
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This slightly larger-than-average-sized school serves Bath and the rural area to the south of the city. The vast majority of pupils are White British and the percentage of pupils whose first language is not English is low. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average, although the percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school is the designated access school within the Bath area and in 2006 admitted ten pupils with complex physical needs. In 2004, the school became a specialist school for science. It has the Healthy School Award, Artsmark Silver and Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Ralph Allen is a good school with many strengths and good capacity to make further improvements. The school is well on the way to living up to its vision of excellence and inclusion as school leaders have created a supportive environment where all pupils, irrespective of their needs, can thrive. Standards are above average and pupils with a variety of complex needs receive outstanding support. Pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well. This is because the good all-round provision, including teaching and learning, is well planned to meet their needs.

Although pupils make good progress throughout the school in many subjects, this is not always the case in Years 10 and 11, where in 2007 pupils underachieved in some subjects. The school has taken action to improve the curriculum and some aspects of teaching. Although these actions have begun to have an impact, progress in Years 10 and 11 is still not as good as in other year groups. Pupils enjoy the wide range of activities provided in lessons and those out of school. Recently introduced courses and programmes are meeting the specific needs of different groups of pupils, including some more vulnerable pupils, effectively. This enables groups of pupils with different aptitudes and abilities to achieve well. The specialist science status has helped to raise standards in science subjects. In citizenship and work-related learning, however, planning is ineffective so different aspects of provision in these areas are uncoordinated.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good because of outstanding care, guidance and support and the improved curriculum. Support for more vulnerable pupils is a particular strength. As a result, the school welcomes and assimilates pupils with widely differing needs highly successfully. Pupils feel safe and well cared for in school and behave well. They are encouraged to make choices leading to healthy lifestyles. Pupils make good contributions to the school and wider communities. The school prepares them well for the next stage of their lives and only a very small percentage do not remain in education, employment or training at the end of their compulsory schooling.

Leadership and management are good. Governors and staff share the headteacher's clear vision for the school. Her strong leadership, together with effective senior and middle leadership, ensures that provision is constantly under review as the school is unstinting in its efforts to meet the widely differing needs of its pupils. Good self-evaluation leads to changes in provision that tackle areas of weakness successfully as the school strives to achieve its goals. The sharp rise in standards in the last two years in Key Stage 4 demonstrates that the school is well equipped to make further improvements.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision for students in the sixth form is good because of the effective collaborative leadership and management. Consequently, it is increasing in size and retention rates are improving. Pass rates in external examinations are above the national average and students make good progress in most subjects compared to their prior attainment at GCSE. Progress is outstanding in English literature and physical education. There is a good range of advanced level courses and an extensive enrichment programme, which meet the aspirations of the students. Teaching and learning are good, with some outstanding lessons taught. Particular strengths are the degree

to which students are encouraged to work independently and the ways in which they support each other. Students are confident and enthusiastic about their sixth form studies. They feel listened to and welcome the many opportunities to adopt leadership roles. Good careers guidance prepares them well for employment and higher education. They value the very good relationships they have with teachers and the individual support they receive. One student commented, 'The teachers here really work hard for you.' They in turn are mature and responsible in their approach to their studies. Students are set challenging targets, are well informed about their progress and know what they have to do to improve their work. A more rigorous and effective system for the consistent monitoring of attendance has been introduced.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement at Key Stage 4 by ensuring pupils in all subjects reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Improve the planning for provision of citizenship and work-related learning so that the learning intentions for pupils are clear, and they are able to make consistent progress in these aspects of their education.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' attainment on entry has remained steady for the last five years at slightly above the national average. Standards, as shown by test and examination results in 2006, were above average at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The most recent results in 2007 and the work of pupils currently in the school show that they remain above average.

Standards at Key Stage 3 have been consistently above average for the last five years. In 2006, test results were exceptionally high, particularly in English and science. At GCSE, the percentage of pupils gaining five grades at A* to C including English and mathematics has risen, particularly in the last two years. In 2006, 63% of the pupils gained five GCSE grades at A* to C including English and mathematics. This was significantly above the national average for 2006 and a major improvement on the 2005 results, which were average. In addition, GCSE results in most subjects were above average for the percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C and A* to A.

Pupils currently in the school are making good progress towards challenging targets. As a result, achievement overall is good. Pupils following science courses achieve well. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3, and higher-attaining pupils make outstanding progress. Progress in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory and improving as a result of the school's improved curricular provision, which is successfully tackling areas of underachievement, including ICT.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, together with religious education, makes a good contribution to the pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A great strength of the school is the consideration and welcome pupils extend to those with complex needs. Pupils make a good contribution to their school community. Collaboration between year groups is good. For example, older pupils support younger ones in the successful

'10:7' project. Behaviour around school and in lessons is good. Pupils show positive attitudes to learning and arrive promptly for lessons. Pupils enjoy coming to school because of its friendly nature and interesting learning activities. Attendance is broadly average and is improving as a result of the school's actions. Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Many take part in after-school sporting activities and take advantage of the healthy food from the school canteen. Pupils feel safe in school and know that they can seek help from staff, who deal with problems quickly. The school council, with governor support, enables all pupils to voice their opinions. Pupils are well prepared for life after Ralph Allen as provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved and standards in English and mathematics are high.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning in all years are good overall, enabling pupils to make good progress. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and they use a good variety of styles to engage students effectively. Lessons are well managed, proceed at a good pace and enable scope for independent working. There are very good relationships between students and with teachers. Students respond well to the challenges set for them. For example, in an outstanding PSHE lesson, students examined the issue of crime and punishment with clarity and empathy through sensible discussion. They respected the views of others in a mature way. Teachers use assessment information and knowledge of pupils' prior attainment effectively to plan activities which engage and interest pupils in their classes with differing needs. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively and help pupils with learning difficulties to make good progress. The school is aware of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning in different subjects. Strategies to tackle areas of weakness are well established. Resources are used well and have improved since the last inspection.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is highly inclusive in nature as courses and programmes are designed specifically to cater for groups of pupils with different needs. For example, programmes run by the school and through external agencies support effectively the personal development and achievement of potentially disadvantaged pupils. These programmes raise pupils' aspirations and improve their motivation, confidence, attendance and social skills. Science, the school's specialist subject, offers a good range of courses at Key Stage 4. The range of science clubs and innovations such as the climate change conference provide good enrichment opportunities. There is good provision for literacy and numeracy. Recent improvements to the provision for ICT are tackling underachievement and enable pupils to make good progress. Citizenship is part of the PSHE programme but is not clearly identified in this provision. Work-related learning is supported well by the work-placement programme and careers guidance but is not planned or coordinated effectively across the school. Well-attended extra-curricular activities, including provision for gifted and talented pupils, take place at lunchtime and after school. These highlight the sporting skills of young people in particular, many of whom complete the sports leadership award

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Outstanding care, guidance and support are at the heart of the inclusive nature of the school. Parents recognise this; as one accurately comments, 'Every effort is made to make all children feel safe and cared for.' Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive outstanding levels of support and guidance from highly committed staff. In particular, the efforts of the school to integrate pupils with complex needs are highly successful. As a result, these pupils are fully included in the life of the school and are highly valued members of the school community. Arrangements for pupils joining the school are effective and enable them to settle quickly. Good support integrates effectively those pupils who might struggle to cope in the initial stages of their secondary education. The school monitors and tracks pupils' progress against targets rigorously and keeps pupils well informed about the progress they are making. The school identifies early those pupils at risk of disaffection or underachievement and well-qualified teaching assistants provide effective individual support. Recent changes to the staffing arrangements for care, guidance and support now enable staff to respond more quickly and effectively to any concerns. The school links well with outside agencies to provide good additional support for pupils. Health and safety are carefully managed across the school and arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are securely in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and her senior colleagues have successfully created an environment where pupils feel valued and secure. This strong ethos, based on good relationships between all members of the school community, creates the right conditions for effective teaching and learning. Teachers are enabled to work together to spread good practice so that all know what constitutes good teaching and learning. Governors challenge the school effectively and work well with senior staff to provide a strong direction to its strategic development. This is based on effective self-evaluation so that the school is focused on appropriate priorities for improvement, particularly the achievement of different groups of pupils. However, improved planning for ICT provision has yet to impact on GCSE results. Planning for citizenship is embryonic and that for work-related learning is uncoordinated at senior level. Middle leadership is good, with particular strengths in both subject leadership and that of care, guidance and support.

Parents have confidence in the school, which is rightly popular. The school actively seeks the views of parents and listens to the pupils' opinions. For example, the covered dome, which improves shelter in the playground, is a direct outcome of consultation with pupils. The school is also supporting parents who are trying to improve transport arrangements to the school. However, a small minority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire indicated that the school does not take account of parents' and pupils' views. The school's accommodation is cramped but resources are efficiently deployed to achieve good value for money. The effective leadership of the specialist science school programme typifies leadership overall. It has a clear purpose, centred upon pupils' enjoyment and an understanding of how science works. As a

result, standards in science have improved at all levels. Partnerships with local primary schools through the specialist status are good, as are the links with external organisations such as the National Trust which enrich the science provision.

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
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

15 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ralph Allen School, Bath, BA2 7AD

My colleagues and I inspected your school recently and I am writing to inform you of our findings. As with all people new to the school, you made us feel welcome. Ralph Allen is a good school where standards are above average and you achieve well, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9 and in the sixth form. In Years 10 and 11, your progress slows, although this is improving. This is because you do better in some subjects than others. The school is well led and managed and is capable of becoming even better. Teaching and learning are good and you get on well with your teachers. The curriculum provides courses that meet most of your different needs. However, the school has not planned courses in citizenship or coordinated work-related learning as well as it should. You behave well and get on well with each other. A great strength of the school is the support it provides for those of you who would otherwise find life in school difficult. You tell us that you feel safe and valued in school and that you enjoy most of your lessons and the range of other activities the school provides.

I have asked the school to make some improvements.

- Make sure pupils do well in all subjects they take in Years 10 and 11. You can help by making sure you try to meet your targets in each subject.
- Make sure that it plans a clear programme for citizenship and coordinates properly the different ways in which you learn about the world of work through work experience, careers guidance and different subjects.

I would like to thank those of you who helped us with the inspection by meeting with my colleagues or talking with us in lessons and around the school. I wish you all every success in the future.

Yours faithfully Tom Winskill Her Majesty's Inspector