

Ribston Hall High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115751
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312053
Inspection dates	27–28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Limm HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	803
6th form	228
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Townsend
Headteacher	Amanda Chong
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2004
School address	Stroud Road Gloucester GL1 5LE
Telephone number	01452 382249
Fax number	01452 308833

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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

This is a selective girls' secondary school of average size, with a small number of boys in the sixth form. It is set within the city of Gloucester, from which it draws most of its students. It has a much lower than average proportion of students eligible for free school meals. Levels of attainment on entry are significantly higher than the national average but not as high as those in many other selective schools. Almost all students are of White British heritage and have English as their first language. The school has had specialist humanities status since 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. Parents and students value its inclusive approach and welcoming atmosphere. Sixth formers make an important contribution to this nurturing culture as mentors and as role models. Standards throughout the school are generally well above national averages although more students should get the highest grades than do so at present. Students respond with enthusiasm and success when set challenging targets. Students' progress in Years 7 to 11 is generally good, although there was a dip in the English results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2007. Careful tracking of students' progress and attainment and detailed analysis of data provided nationally are used to identify underachieving individuals and determine the style and level of intervention needed. Standards achieved in the sixth form are above average overall, with some variations between subjects. Increasing numbers are joining the school at this stage, including boys. Sixth form students make good progress, partly because they complement good teaching with their own well developed skills and determination to succeed. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are well qualified, with confident subject knowledge. Continuing professional development, including mentoring and coaching, has ensured that most, though not all, understand the need to develop a variety of approaches to encourage independent learning and ensure that students of all abilities, including those of the highest ability, are consistently challenged to do their best. The school plans to address this inconsistency by ensuring that the quality of all lessons is as good as the best ones observed during the inspection.

Rates of attendance are significantly better than the national average and behaviour both in lessons and around the school is excellent. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and enjoy sports and activities such as dance. Students feel safe and are very confident that any problems will be quickly and sensitively resolved, either by teachers or by sixth form mentors. The main school curriculum is largely traditional but provision is made, in collaboration with other schools, for girls to take vocational courses if they wish to. Only a few opt to do so, but all appreciate having the choice. Leadership and management are good overall and this represents a marked improvement since the previous inspection. The governing body sets precise, short-term targets for the headteacher and monitors progress carefully. Secure child protection procedures are in place. The school knows itself well and is comfortable with the targets set. It is well placed to improve further. Leadership of the humanities specialism is especially good and this has ensured that specialist school status has had a big impact on the performance of the school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Admission requirements are not as stringent as some selective schools but although this means that some students embark on challenging advanced level courses, they nevertheless make good progress and attain above average standards. In the 2007 A-level examinations, for example, students taking dance, geography, German and government and politics did particularly well, all obtaining the highest (A/B) grades. Not all subjects perform as well as others, or obtain the best from their students, and these inconsistencies prevent standards and achievement being outstanding. Students' personal development is good. Their keenness to learn is reflected in their good attendance and exemplary behaviour. They participate fully in the many musical, dramatic, educational and social activities,

and contribute well to charitable causes. Curricular provision is good, embracing a wide range of subjects at AS and A level and developments such as a Baccalaureate-style examination and on-line courses. Tutors are increasingly involved as the first point of contact for academic and personal support, and this is effective in creating a safe and stimulating learning environment. The sixth form is led and managed well. The head of sixth form and her committed staff have focused tightly on improving students' progress further and enhancing monitoring and the effectiveness of guidance and support. Together they have good capacity to improve the sixth form further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that progress is good in all subjects in the sixth form.
- Raise the quality of teaching so that all lessons promote good independent learning and challenge students of all abilities to do their best.
- Ensure that more students attain the highest grades at GCSE.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Attainment on entry to the school is higher than for schools nationally, but not as high as for most selective schools. As might be expected for the past six years results have been well above average compared to schools nationally both at the end of Key Stage 3 and at GCSE.

Nevertheless, these results also represent good progress for students in a selective school. GCSE results are well above average and improving. The majority of students in the sixth form attain good standards given the open access admissions policy which results in many of them embarking on advanced courses with minimum entry requirements. Departments are now using assessment information consistently to help students identify what it is they need to do to improve. The progress of higher attaining students has been lower in the past than might be expected and the school is addressing this by providing further support for them. Although these students are now achieving higher results in internal tests they have not yet secured the highest grades in national tests. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their peers. Results in humanities, the school's specialism, are good and the impact of specialist status has been hugely positive even though humanities subjects have traditionally performed well. Students in the sixth form make good progress overall although there is some inconsistency in the rate of progress between subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The students enjoy being at school and value the support they are given to achieve well. They feel safe and say that bullying is extremely rare; any incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively. Individual students are supported well by the school counsellor. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress well. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. They benefit from a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship through lessons and special day events, for example focusing on enterprise. They have extensive opportunities to participate in sport and many do so. Students make healthy choices and are keen to see healthy food on offer. Many students

make a good contribution to the community of the school and beyond, and are keen to take on more responsibility. They undertake charity work and help those in their community, for example through the senior citizens party. The newly formed school parliament is becoming an effective channel for students' opinions, which are responded to, for example in changes to school uniform. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being because they reach high standards in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), but their awareness of the world of work is less well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers assess students' attainment well and track their progress rigorously. Students know their targets and what they have to do to improve. The school is using this assessment information well to identify underachievement and in most departments to ensure that the learning needs of students are met appropriately in lessons, but there is inconsistency in the way some teachers are doing this. A lead practitioner has been appointed to coordinate provision for gifted and talented students but it is too early for this provision to have resulted in markedly higher academic achievement for these students. Students are keen to engage actively in their lessons and they say they enjoy most those lessons that enable them to have good discussions and lively group work. Not all lessons are like this. Students' scope for independent thought and enquiry is limited when discussions are too strongly teacher led or when lessons do not provide appropriate challenge across the full ability range. The school recognises this and has recently introduced more rigorous lesson observations to ensure all lessons are as good as the best ones.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The main school curriculum combines a traditional range of subjects with opportunities to access collaborative city-wide courses of a more vocational character. The school recognises that more vocational courses could be provided for those girls who do not wish to travel to other schools and it has planned to introduce more once other local authority 14 to 19 programmes have been accepted. Enrichment courses at Key Stage 4 include geology and music. Theme days have been introduced at Key Stages 3 and 4 to provide opportunities to experience engineering in Year 9, citizenship and enterprise activities. In the sixth form, 25 AS- and A-level subjects are available including on-line classical civilisation and film studies. The school has addressed the issues raised in the last inspection in relation to the delivery of ICT and religious studies. The school provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities which includes many sports and performing arts and large numbers of students take part in these. The whole school benefits from an enrichment week each year. Specialist humanities status has led to a higher number of students studying humanities subjects, especially in the sixth form. The school works well with primary schools and contributes strongly to community projects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school tracks students' progress rigorously and identifies underachievement quickly. Academic guidance is a strength. The directors of learning and support carry out a key role which successfully brings together pastoral and academic support so that students are enabled to achieve well. The school works well with the Connexions service to ensure effective support as students move to the next stage of their education. Procedures for child protection and for safeguarding young people are robust. The school works well with other agencies to ensure effective and timely support for vulnerable students. Detailed plans are made to support students with specific learning needs. The dispersed leadership of personal, social and health education, work-related learning and enterprise limits the coherence of planning and provision in this area, which has not yet been part of the school's evaluation cycle.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Senior managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, based on a rigorous analysis of data and other evidence, including lesson observations and surveys of the views of parents and students. Good progress has been made in the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. More effective systems for tracking and monitoring students' progress have been introduced and the information from this has helped managers to intervene earlier when students are underperforming. The leadership and management of subjects have been improved since the last inspection and departmental self-evaluation is good. Good progress has been made in achieving the school's targets, including those for its humanities specialism. Governors have a detailed knowledge of the school, are highly effective in meeting their statutory requirements and provide good support, as well as an appropriate level of challenge. The school makes good use of its resources. The additional funds for the specialism have been used effectively, for example to improve the accommodation and provision for ICT.

The school works effectively in partnership with other schools and agencies to support the education and well-being of its own students and the local community. The great majority of parents are very supportive of the work of the school and feel it is providing a good quality of education and care. Parents of Year 7 students are particularly complimentary about the help their daughters received in making the transfer from primary schools, and many parents praised the support given to their children when they encountered academic or personal difficulties.

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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?	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	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
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?	2	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	
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

29 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Ribston Hall High School, Gloucester, GL1 5LE

When we visited your school recently to see how well it is doing, you made our task much easier and hugely enjoyable by the cheerful and courteous way you answered our questions, and shared your thoughts with us.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to let you know what we feel your school does well and how it might be even better. We agree that it is a good school. As some of you explained to us, amongst its strengths are its friendliness and the well judged care, guidance and support you are given by your teachers and by students in the sixth form. It was good to hear that you feel safe and are confident that any difficulties will be quickly and sensitively resolved. We were impressed by how articulate and self-possessed you are, how extremely well you behave, and how willingly you take on responsibility for each other and for those in need in the wider community. Helped by good teaching, you make good progress through the school, including the sixth form. We feel that more of you than at present should achieve the highest grades at GCSE and we have asked the school to make sure you do, for instance by making all lessons as good as the best ones you experience. You can help by trying hard to meet the targets the school sets you. In the sixth form some subjects get better results than others and the school will seek to improve the results of those that do less well.

I wish you and your school continuing success.

Yours sincerely

Peter Limm Her Majesty's Inspector



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