

Rainham Mark Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118892
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	313139
Inspection date	16 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1225
Sixth form	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elaine Jackson
Headteacher	Simon Decker
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Pump Lane Rainham Gillingham ME8 7AJ
Telephone number	01634 364151
Fax number	01634 260209

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

Pupils' standards and achievement.

The effectiveness of the sixth form.

The impact of the school's specialist status in raising standards.

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, analysis of school and nationally published data, school documents, the views of parents, and discussions with pupils, sixth form students, staff and the chair of governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is a larger than average, mixed selective school, taking pupils from over 30 local primary schools. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than usual for a grammar school. The school works collaboratively with two other local secondary schools to provide sixth form courses. Since the last inspection the school has been awarded specialist science college status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Rainham Mark Grammar School provides good quality education for its pupils. It also has many outstanding features to its work. The vast majority of parents commented very positively in response to the inspection questionnaire. Comments summarising the views expressed by many include, 'We are very pleased with the way RMGS is run,' and, 'All the teachers show great commitment and dedication.' The school seeks the views of pupils and parents regularly and pupils are confident that they make a significant input to the school's development, for example by contributing to the appointment of new staff or in representing pupils' views at governing body meetings. Parents particularly value the outstanding care, guidance and support provided for their children, for example in the statement of one parent who commented, 'We like the fact that children's well-being and pastoral needs are as important as examination results and think that's why they do so well.'

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Pupils appreciate the sense of school community and, in turn, make a real contribution to it and the wider community. During the inspection a group of pupils took an assembly about internet safety which made an impact on their fellow pupils, and the group is taking this presentation out to other schools. Pupils commented particularly on how safe they feel in school and how there is always someone available to help them resolve any personal problems or to give extra support if there is anything they do not understand about their studies. Pupils' economic well-being is developed well through a range of activities including work experience and enterprise projects, and a financial studies programme in the sixth form. The school's strength in giving pupils good guidance for the future is recognised in the award of the Investor in Careers Quality Mark. The emphasis on developing pupils' confidence and personal qualities means that pupils are outstandingly equipped for their future lives. Exceptionally positive relationships and good humour across the whole school mean that pupils enjoy relaxing together socially. They attend a very wide range of clubs and extra-curricular activities, making a good contribution to their health and well-being.

Standards in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE examinations are exceptionally and consistently high, and pupils systematically widen the gap between their performance and national averages from their starting points when they join the school. Results in science and modern foreign languages had not matched those in other subjects for a few years, but school data indicates that pupils attained better results in these subjects in 2008. The achievement of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is exceptionally high because their needs are understood well and they are given top quality support. Good teaching and well planned and relevant curriculum help pupils to achieve well and develop the knowledge and skills necessary for their chosen further education and careers. Lessons are challenging and pupils say that teachers make them fun. This, together with the excellent relationships they have with their teachers, keeps pupils motivated and participating fully in lessons. Pupils have a good understanding of the quality of their work and there is much good marking to help pupils understand what they have to do next. However, a small minority of parents rightly commented that this is not consistent and a few books are not marked regularly enough to give pupils helpful feedback.

Leadership and management are good at all levels, including governance. The headteacher has high expectations and sets a clear view about future development. Aspects of the school's work are reviewed systematically and relative weaknesses addressed quickly. Teamwork across the

school is very effective and staff feel valued for the part they play. Recent improvements in tracking pupils' performance are helping the school to monitor pupils' progress more closely and plan appropriate support if a pupil is experiencing difficulty. The Investor in People award is evidence of the value the school places on staff training and development. A number of teachers have participated in a national initiative to support their professional development and improve teaching and learning. This has already led to improvements in teaching, for example in the sixth form where teaching and learning are outstanding. Taking this forward and disseminating the most effective teaching practices is a key focus for further development this year.

The school's specialist science college status is having a positive impact on the school and its partners, including local primary and secondary schools, for example in extending the use of information technology across the school. Although the school has not been successful in meeting the highly challenging targets it set for academic performance, largely because of staff recruitment difficulties, this situation has now been resolved and science standards are improving rapidly across the school. An increasing number of students are choosing to follow science courses in the sixth form.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This large sixth form provides a good quality of education for its students. Since the last inspection, the school has improved sixth form provision by working collaboratively with other schools to offer an outstandingly wide range of courses. The school is flexible, ensuring that students are enabled, as far as possible, to choose the combination of courses to meet their individual needs. Students' enjoyment of the sixth form is seen in the large number choosing to continue with four subjects from AS to A level. The school is rightly proud of the improvements made to teaching and learning in the sixth form, and the impact of this is seen in improving standards and achievement. Lessons give students a range of interesting activities and challenge, and high quality questioning gives them valuable opportunities to reflect on their own learning and understanding. As a result, standards are rising, particularly the proportion of students reaching the higher A/B grades at A level. Students make good progress from their starting points and standards in AS and A level examinations are above the national average in most subjects.

Students are mature and lead by example, making an outstanding contribution to whole school life and taking part in many activities beyond the school. Students recognise the benefits they gain from their involvement, for example as Millennium Volunteers. Students also appreciate the exceptionally strong care and support and the time and effort put in by their teachers. A good tutorial programme supports students very well, for example in developing study skills and making choices for the next stages in their lives. Another significant strength apparent in the sixth form is leadership and management. The vision for the future is clear and the school has good capacity to implement its plans. Leaders recognise that they have not always analysed performance data in sufficient depth as the basis for planning future developments.

What the school should do to improve further

- To accelerate further pupils' progress, build on the existing strengths in teaching to refine and disseminate the most effective practice more widely across the school.

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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?	1	1
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	1	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/or disabilities make progress	1	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
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 learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Rainham Mark Grammar School, Gillingham ME8 7AJ

It was a great pleasure to meet some of the students during our recent visit to your school. Thank you very much for the warm welcome. We were particularly impressed by the maturity you showed in our discussions, as well as your sense of humour and enjoyment of one another's company.

- Here are some of the main findings from our report and I hope that you will take the opportunity to read the report in full as well. You are rightly proud of your school - RMGS is a good school. It also has some outstanding features.
- The results in the Year 9 tests and GCSE are already high and improving each year. Students' performance in the sixth form is above average.
- Good teaching and a good curriculum help you to do well.
- The school is a safe, inclusive and cohesive community.
- You make an excellent contribution to the school and the wider community in a number of ways, such as taking responsibility as 'buddies' for younger pupils or as school councillors.
- Most of you enjoy school a lot and see the very wide range of extra-curricular activities as a particularly positive aspect of the school.
- Many of you commented on how you are listened to and how much you value that staff are always ready to help you to work things out for yourselves.
- Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities get really good support and do exceptionally well.
- The school is well managed and you appreciate that you are consulted on how to develop things in the future.
- Your success academically, and the broad range of your other personal skills, prepare you well for your future beyond school.

The school is always striving for improvement and has a great potential to continue to help you to achieve even more. We agree with staff that they should learn more from one another about the most effective teaching to help you further. Best wishes and good luck with all your many activities this year.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings Lead inspector