

Epsom and Ewell High School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 125305 |
| Local Authority | Surrey |
| Inspection number | 315229 |
| Inspection dates | 19–20 November 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Maria Dawes HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 818 |
| Sixth form | 129 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Steve Winter |
| Headteacher | Mrs Alison Dawson |
| Date of previous school inspection | 17 January 2005 |
| School address | Ruxley Lane West Ewell Epsom KT19 9JW |
| Telephone number | 020 8974 0400 |
| Fax number | 020 8974 0401 |

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|--------------------------|---------------------|
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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

Epsom and Ewell High School is a smaller than average comprehensive school serving a diverse community. The school has a small Hearing Resource Base for about nine students. Overall, the proportion of students who have a statement of special educational need is well above the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, mostly with moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, varies from year to year but is consistently above average. The school has a small Hearing Resource Base for about 9 students. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is around the same as that found nationally. Mobility is high with around one in seven of the students starting at the school other than at the expected time, many of them from overseas.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The progress of too many students is inadequate. Standards are broadly average on entry to Year 7 but are below average by the end of Year 11. Many students, and in particular girls, are failing to reach their targets. Standards in English fell in both key stages in 2008. The percentage of students that attained the national expectation of Level 5 or above at the end of Year 9 was exceptionally low. Severe staffing difficulties in English mean that the majority of students do not have a permanent teacher; this continues to hinder their progress. There are also staffing difficulties in some other subjects. Many students and parents are concerned about this. Through the sound support that they receive, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and especially those with hearing impairments and moderate learning difficulties, do better than their peers and make satisfactory and sometimes better than satisfactory progress.

Standards and achievement vary across and within subjects for a variety of reasons. Central to this is that the quality of teaching is not of a satisfactory standard overall. Whilst there is some well planned good teaching that engages students and enables them to learn, too much teaching is satisfactory and some is inadequate. Students, staff and parents consider that the poor behaviour of a small minority frequently has a negative impact on the learning of a larger proportion of students. The use of assessment and marking is not precise or consistent enough. Although the school is now setting adequately challenging targets for students, many students remain unsure about what they need to do to improve.

Students' personal development and well-being are inadequate. Many students are disaffected and do not enjoy their education. This is reflected in the poor attendance and behaviour of a substantial minority. Consequently, there were very high levels of external and internal exclusions last year. The school has recently put in place a range of strategies to address this, including a more appropriate curriculum for disaffected students in Key Stage 4, and early indications are positive.

Despite being committed to improve outcomes for students, the senior leaders and staff lack sufficient experience or capacity to make adequate inroads into solving the problems. The senior leadership team has an understanding of the problems that the school faces. However, they have not monitored or evaluated comprehensively enough all aspects of provision and outcomes for students in order to identify focused actions to ensure rapid and assured improvement. In particular, leaders and managers do not have a clear picture of the quality of teaching and learning. Also, the use of information about students' progress that informs teaching and enables the setting of appropriately challenging work is at a very early stage. The governors have not acted to assess the performance of the school or hold the headteacher adequately accountable for weaknesses in provision and leadership.

Despite the difficulties that the school is experiencing, staff morale remains high. Staff are keen to emphasise the good rapport they have with most of the students and want to do the best for them. The senior leadership team has been restructured leading to a more appropriate and clear structure. In addition, the headteacher has recently put in place a more robust system

of line management of subjects and other aspects of the school. However, this has not yet had an impact on the quality of teaching and learning or on outcomes for many students. Middle managers welcome the recent opportunities to develop their leadership skills, share good practice and develop consistent practices. Recently, there has been some promising improvement in aspects of the school's work, such as attendance and the use of data, and many staff are keen to embrace change.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form aims to be fully inclusive and, as a result, the average attainment on entry is just below the national average. Students make satisfactory progress through their time in the sixth form and by the end of Year 13 standards are comparable to those found nationally. Within this general picture, relatively small numbers of students achieve the higher grades A and B in their GCE exams and a small proportion of them fail to achieve the individual targets agreed with the school.

Most sixth-form students like coming to school because they feel that they are treated as adults and because they enjoy their lessons. The attendance of a small number of students is, however, a concern. The school has responded by putting in place strategies to monitor and improve attendance more effectively. The sixth form is relatively small which means that students receive a lot of individual support and guidance. The increase in the range of vocational subjects being offered this year provides more learning opportunities for a greater range of students.

The head of sixth form is highly respected by students who appreciate her dedication to improving the provision. She has introduced the 'Student Learning Plan' which encourages students to reflect on their work and to set personal targets with their tutors on a weekly basis. A tutorial programme also enables students to expand their learning skills. However, there is insufficient monitoring of the overall provision within the sixth form and of the impact of actions which have been taken to make improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of leadership and managers at all levels.
- Put in place effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school.
- Ensure that students make at least satisfactory progress across the school, particularly in English.
- Improve the quality of all teaching and learning and ensure that students know how to improve their work.
- Improve the attendance and behaviour of a significant minority of students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students enter the school with standards that are broadly average. During Key Stage 3 students make satisfactory progress in science and mathematics. Standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with those found nationally. However, in English, progress is inadequate and standards at the end of Year 9 in 2008 were well below those found nationally. The regular use of supply teachers at Key Stage 3 is hampering students' progress.

In general, standards at Key Stage 4 are below those found nationally and the proportion of students gaining 5 A* to C grades including English and mathematics fell in 2008. A significant

proportion of students do not reach their targets and in particular, girls make inadequate progress. Achievement in English is especially poor. However, within this picture students achieve well in some subjects such as modern foreign languages and information and communication technology because of better teaching and an appropriate curriculum. Until very recently all targets were insufficiently challenging and students' progress was not monitored well enough.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. This is attributable to sound support that meets their learning needs. Students in the hearing resource base make outstanding progress due to very good provision and support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

Students' personal development is unsatisfactory overall. Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are satisfactory. Students explore values, beliefs and moral issues well and are encouraged to develop personal qualities through mentoring others and, they say, 'looking out for' members of their Pastoral House. They enjoy being part of a mixed-year tutor group and the school community is generally cohesive.

Attitudes to learning, engagement and enjoyment are unsatisfactory. Behaviour is also unsatisfactory. Although most students behave well they often comment that the poor behaviour of a small number of students frequently interferes with their learning and enjoyment. This is particularly when teachers are not permanent members of staff or do not insist enough on high standards. Although the number of exclusions remain high, there has been a marked reduction because of improved access to an alternative curriculum. Attendance has very recently improved but remains unsatisfactory. The impact of newly introduced strategies has not yet been analysed because insufficient information has been collected to usefully underpin further actions.

Students say that they feel safe; however, they feel the school needs to work harder to reduce the incidents of bullying. They enjoy the various sports activities, especially the early morning clubs. Contributions to school life and the community are satisfactory. Prefects are proud of their role and many students welcome responsibilities. Sixth-form students play an impressive part in the school community through supporting younger students as their counsellors. Enterprise education throughout the school is not strong. This combined with the low proportion of students that achieve 5 A* to C grades with English and mathematics means that students are not being prepared adequately for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Students make insufficient progress in their learning because the teaching is inconsistent. Too few lessons are good or better and some are inadequate. Students reported that the extensive use of temporary teachers, particularly in the English department, was severely affecting their enjoyment and achievement. Comments in the parents' questionnaires also echoed the concerns raised by the students.

Overall lesson planning lacks rigour and detail to meet the needs of all learners. Teachers are only beginning to use prior information about students to plan their lessons. Expectations of students are frequently too low, students do not always know what is expected of them and

the pace of learning is slow. Consequently, students lose interest and chat to one another or disengage from the lesson. When teachers do not manage this successfully, learning is further restricted. When a purposeful and more successful learning environment is in place, as was evident in modern foreign languages and in drama, students talked enthusiastically about their learning, and explained how their teachers created fun lessons using different types of independent and group tasks.

The marking of students' work is variable in quality and inconsistent across the whole school. In most subjects students do not receive feedback to help them know how to make progress. Few students were able to discuss what they need to do to improve their work and many reported that in English they had received very limited support for their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Although the curriculum meets statutory requirements there is insufficient time provided to enable students to develop their understanding of personal, social and health education. The school has recently increased the vocational opportunities available to students in Key Stage 4 and these are proving successful. These courses establish clear pathways on to similar courses in the sixth form. The new vocational courses also supplement an alternative curriculum for Years 10 and 11 which provides a good range of learning opportunities for less able students and those who find the traditional curriculum less relevant.

The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is broad and balanced. The timetable is structured in such a way that nearly all lessons are delivered in single-period slots inhibiting the opportunities for teachers to expand their range of teaching strategies in order to raise standards. All students have the opportunity to take part in work experience during Year 10 and there is a satisfactory range of enrichment and extension opportunities provided by the school. In particular, intervention strategies in the form of Saturday and Easter Schools and coursework clubs for Year 11 helped to improve some results last year.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Overall students receive unsatisfactory care, guidance and support but there are strengths. There is lack of cohesion in the provision for inclusion and in identifying those at risk of failure.

There is very good provision for students with hearing impairment. This is because information gathered about them by the experienced staff is efficient and organised so that effective checks on their progress are made. Similarly, the Learning Opportunities Centre provides, what a member of staff described as, a place where students 'can work through a problem that is interrupting his or her learning'. Students say that they feel safe here. There are good links with a network of agencies, specialists, nurses, social care and the community police officer. However, provision for individual students is not always monitored or clearly enough coordinated and communicated to all staff. Consequently, many students remain detached and are often absent. In addition, the overall impact of current provision and support for the least able students or disengaged students has not yet been monitored or evaluated by managers.

Heads of Houses and tutors are beginning to get to grips with the new systems for checking students' progress and giving guidance to students to help them improve their attainment. However, this is in an early stage of development. Although students are now aware of their target grades they are unsure about what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Leadership and management at all levels are not consistently strong enough to secure the rapid pace of improvement needed to raise students' achievement. Since the headteacher took up her position in September 2007 she has successfully addressed the school's large budget deficit, restructured the senior leadership team and dealt with major staffing issues. She has a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and has recently begun to put in place consistent systems to hold all leaders accountable for student outcomes and provision. However, this is at a very early stage and monitoring and evaluation procedures have not yet been robust enough to bring about sustained improvements in students' achievement or aspects such as behaviour. Recent training has supported leaders and managers in developing this but it is too soon to see the impact on enhancing learning in subject areas and some middle leaders still feel insecure in their work.

The school's improvement plan identifies the right priorities but is not sharp enough to bring about rapid improvement. Nor does it include rigorous success criteria or interim reviews, by which senior leaders and governors can judge the success of their actions. The improvement plans of middle leaders vary in quality. Targets have not been challenging enough in the past to generate clear and high expectations. Governors recently have become far more informed about the difficulties that the school faces. However they fail to hold the school sufficiently to account. The leaders, managers and governors of the school have not demonstrated the capacity to bring about the rapid improvement that is required.

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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 |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 4 | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | No | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being? | 3 | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 4 | 3 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 4 | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 4 | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress | 3 | |

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? | 4 | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 4 | |
| The attendance of learners | 4 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 4 | |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 3 | |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 4 | |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 4 | 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? | 4 | 3 |

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 4 | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 4 | |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 4 | |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 4 | 4 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 3 | |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 3 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 4 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 4 | |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | Yes | |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No | |

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

14 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Epsom and Ewell High School, Epsom, KT19 9JW

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and would like to thank you for helping us with our work, and your honest and open replies to our questions. It is clear that you value the support that your teachers and other staff give you and we were impressed with the mutual support you give to each other through your house and tutor group system.

We recognise that the school has made some improvement recently, but we do not think that it gives you a good enough quality of education. We have therefore placed your school in 'Special Measures', which means that there will be a visit by inspectors each term to check on the progress made.

Too many of you are not making as much progress in your learning as you should be. In particular, the standards you reach in English by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are not high enough. We know that the school has had difficulty in recruiting permanent teachers meaning that many of you have had too many changes of teacher in some core subjects. Overall, the work you are given does not challenge you enough and you are not receiving enough guidance from staff to help you make faster progress. In addition, many of you told us that the poor behaviour of a minority of students in lessons interferes with your learning.

We were pleased to note the recent improvement in attendance, but it still remains lower than we expect of students in secondary school. We hope that you will all take personal responsibility to attend school every day and will only be absent when you have a genuine reason.

We have asked your headteacher and the staff to improve things by:

- ensuring that you make rapid progress in all your subjects particularly in English
- making the quality of all teaching and learning as good as the best and making sure you all know how to improve your work
- helping you to improve your attendance and behaviour
- ensuring that the school carefully monitors and checks all aspects of its work.

Your headteacher and staff are committed to getting things right for you and we are sure you will continue to support them in this.

With best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Maria A Dawes

Her Majesty's Inspector