

Jo Richardson Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133561
Local Authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	316152
Inspection date	6 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Adrian Lyons 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1316
Sixth form	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Graham Bramley
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Buck
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2003
School address	Castle Green Gale Street Dagenham RM9 4UN
Telephone number	020 8270 6222
Fax number	020 8270 6223

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the consistency of the quality of provision
- the impact of the specialisms of music and mathematics in improving provision and raising standards
- the development of the sixth form and quality of collaborative arrangements
- the extent to which the school's most able students achieve to the best of their ability.

They gathered evidence from discussions with senior and middle leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, observation of students engaged in activities around the school and discussion with groups of students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but 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

This average-size school opened in 2002 in East London. It has more boys than girls. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is average while the proportion whose first language is not English is below average. An above-average proportion of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is a specialist music and mathematics college. The sixth form, part of the southern consortium of four local sixth forms, is new and there have not yet been any end-of-course results for Year 13.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'I honestly cannot say enough good things about this school'; 'I am very proud to have my daughter at JRCS'; 'an exceptional school'. These comments by parents are typical of the unprecedented volume, unanimity and positivity of parental questionnaires received by inspectors. This added weight to the inspectors' judgement that the Jo Richardson Community School is outstanding. The school sees communication with parents as central to its work and the systems are remarkable. Indeed, when staff compiled a list of what makes their school exceptional, at the very top of the list was the administration team and exceptional communication with parents and passing on messages. The school has exceptionally strong systems to ensure that parental concerns do not fall through the net. Parental attendance at events including academic review days is excellent. The school even has contested elections for parental governors.

Key to the success of the school is the 'zero tolerance' policy towards even minor transgressions. The condition of the buildings with no hint of litter or gum is testimony to the high regard with which students and staff treat the environment. Another aspect of the school's special character is that some areas are shared with the public, including the library. This is managed in a way that maintains student safety and safeguarding arrangements are excellent. Indeed, care for student well-being is exceptional. Students spoke to inspectors movingly about the care and support they had received to assist their personal development. A parent wrote, 'a fantastic school which is dedicated to the welfare of the children in a family crisis'.

Consistency in following procedures is another key ingredient in the school's success. There is a clear teaching framework and policies and procedures are followed systematically. Lessons are consistently at least good and, coupled with the quality of feedback and support for students, the impact on learning is outstanding. As one Year 13 student said, 'Lessons are fun enough to make them interesting.' A key element of the school's approach to learning in lessons is the frequent opportunities to pause, reflect and discuss.

On the day of the inspection no normal lessons were taking place, so inspectors were unable to observe formal lessons. Indeed, most of the school were off-site, engaged in a wide range of learning activities outside of the classroom, such as visits to the London Eye, London Zoo, the Globe Theatre and Ypres in Belgium. Inspectors visited a number of extended curriculum activities enjoyed by the minority of students left in school, including the well-organised 'dragons' den'-style enterprise activity, and a 'fair trade workshop'. Sixth formers were involved in assessing the needs of the local community for volunteering opportunities. Despite the lack of formal lessons, evidence of the good quality relationships and excellent approach to teaching and learning was plentiful. Several activities involved partnership with external organisations and these are managed very well.

The outstanding curriculum provides an excellent balance between creative, physical and academic work. A particular strength is the way in which different subjects are linked together to motivate and engage students, giving them extensive opportunities to apply their skills across subjects. It also helps them to develop important life skills, such as learning about budgeting and finance. Excellent use of educational visits makes learning fun and meaningful. The school has established itself as a strong centre for music and performing arts and, through its specialist status, uses this very well to support student learning. For example, a gifted and talented student took GCSE and AS music in Year 10, to open up additional opportunities for

him in Year 11. There are very good opportunities to develop interest and talents in drama, dance, music and art and through these to celebrate the variety of cultures in the school. A substantial range of options in Year 10 and 11 enables students to match the curriculum to their interests and ambitions. This has yet to feed through quite so well to the sixth form curriculum. There is a particularly strong element of work-related learning within the compulsory curriculum, and a variety of events to foster enterprise and financial awareness.

Students enter the school with academic standards that are well below average. At the end of Year 11 the proportion of students gaining the Level 2 'threshold' of five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, is broadly average. This is the result of excellent achievement as students progress through the school. There is evidence of outstanding achievement in all year groups and among all groups of students, including high attainers, although there are individuals who underperform. In Years 10 and 11 progress in English is especially strong. The setting of challenging academic targets has contributed to a raising of expectations, matched by pupils' excellent level of achievement. The school acted quickly to identify and support relatively weaker-performing subjects following the 2007 results and substantial improvements were seen in the identified subjects in 2008.

The partnership headteacher and the head of school provide outstanding and inspirational leadership. The senior leadership team combine high-level organisational skills with a capacity to encourage others to share their vision and commitment. They guide an enthusiastic and talented staff, described by parents as 'friendly and helpful', who are working hard to develop students' interest, self-esteem and commitment and so raise standards. Management systems are mostly excellent and are central to school improvement. The needs of the area the school serves are comprehensively understood and the head of school relates very well to parents and the community. This really is a 'community school' in action as well as name. Indeed, the excellent contribution to the community extends as far as Gambia, where the school funds the running costs of a nursery school. International links are very well developed with students working in partnerships in locations as diverse as Kenya and New York.

Nothing is too much effort where the students are concerned. A very strong team of staff has been created, all of whom share the same determination to do their best for the pupils. Governors have a very clear view of the school's performance. They play an active part and the school benefits considerably in terms of its strong links with the community. The school's contribution to community cohesion in this complex, urban environment is outstanding. Students' great enjoyment of school is evidenced by their good attendance and punctuality. Behaviour around the school is excellent. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is given a high priority and is very successful. The way in which relative weaknesses in provision are identified and tackled provides strong evidence of the school's outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The current Year 13 is the first in the school's history. Therefore, no students have yet completed a two-year course of Advanced level study. Sixth form students value the level of support they receive from teachers and enjoy their lessons. The consortium arrangement extends the variety of subjects on offer and provides centres of excellence for subjects with fewer specialist teachers, such as physics. Students completing one-year courses at Level 2 did very well in 2008. End-of-Year-12 assessments showed a more mixed picture on two-year Level 3 courses with Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses performing well, but some teething

problems in General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level. The school has recognised this and taken action to improve performance in weaker areas and better guide students in the current Year 12 on to appropriate courses.

Students benefit from the same high level of care and support as in the main school, although the guidance to students is less systematically followed through in the sixth form. Students' personal development and well-being is good. While there is a good range of enrichment activity available, there is currently no structured taught tutorial programme preparing students coherently for adult life. Overall, students' academic and personal progress in the sixth form is not yet as dramatic as in the main school because teachers and managers are still getting used to the new requirements and working methods. However, the impact of actions already taken to make the sixth form successful, together with the track record of the main school, are evidence of outstanding capacity to improve the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a level of consistency in the sixth form that reflects that found in the main 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?	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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	2
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	2	
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?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

20 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Jo Richardson Community School, Dagenham, RM9 4UN

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school. Thank you for taking part in the inspection by talking to us about your work, your life in school and all you do. It was a joy and a privilege for us to visit your school. We regret that we missed seeing most of you as you were enjoying out-of-school activities. We believe yours is an outstanding school and here are the reasons.

You achieve extremely well. Although on average the results with which you begin Year 7 are well below average, the results at GCSE are around the national average and the school gives you an excellent chance to do well. You told us about how well you are supported by teachers and while in every school some lessons are better than others, the overall quality of teaching and learning in your school is outstanding. You told us about the many opportunities you have out of normal lessons, such as trips and visits. It was good to hear about what some of you had learnt about business and enterprise on your return from the London Eye.

We observed and heard about excellent behaviour around the school. Your parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and we found that contact between the school and your parents is unusually strong. You told us about how different groups of students get along very well. Students from different ethnic backgrounds and religions work together and set an example for the community.

Although we have judged your school to be outstanding, that does not mean that it is perfect. The sixth form is good, but not yet quite as excellent as the main school. This is because the sixth form is new and still developing. Not all of the things that make the main school outstanding are present in the sixth form. We have asked the school to concentrate on making the sixth form even better.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Lyons

Her Majesty's Inspector