

Riddlesdown High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101818
Local Authority	Croydon
Inspection number	323534
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Gale HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1895
Sixth form	311
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Lewis
Headteacher	Mr Gordon Smith
Date of previous school inspection	28 September 2005
School address	Honister Heights Purley CR8 1EX
Telephone number	020 8668 5136
Fax number	020 8660 9025

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Inspection number	323534

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

Riddlesdown High is a large voluntary-aided school and has been accredited as a Specialist Science College since September 2004. Nearly four fifths of students are from a White British background. The numbers who speak English as an additional language are low and the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below the national average. These include emotional and behavioural difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. Riddlesdown has been accredited with Artsmark, Geography Mark and recently the Healthy School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Riddlesdown High School provides its students with a satisfactory standard of education. The school's organisational structure, in place for many years, has proved successful in maintaining students' standards of attainment above the national average. However, rates of progress have declined in comparison with other schools. In 2008, although Year 11 achievement overall was satisfactory, some groups of students did not make the progress they should have. Through their self-evaluation work the principal and senior team identified restrictions on the curriculum, due to school organisation, as a contributory factor. A major restructuring is underway with the school moving from a faculty system to a planned division into smaller colleges running in parallel. The majority of parents are in favour of the new 'collegiate' system although some expressed concerns about its possible consequences.

School data including GCSE module tests and internal assessments show that progress is faster in most subjects for the current Year 11 than for those completing their studies in 2008, and many students are on track to meet challenging targets. However, progress for this year group remains satisfactory overall. The curriculum is evolving and improving at Riddlesdown and students generally report increasing satisfaction with the opportunities available to them. However, options available to students in the current Year 10 were more comprehensive than those open to the current Year 11. The constraints on Year 11, while fewer than for previous cohorts, resulted in some students following inappropriate courses. Progress is uneven across the curriculum, ranging from very good to inadequate. This is because teaching ranges from outstanding to satisfactory. In the small number of subjects where students make inadequate progress, this is due to a combination of weaker teaching and inappropriate curriculum. However due to faster progress in most subjects school predictions, based on accurate tracking and GCSE module test results, indicate that the current Year 11 will provide the school with its best ever GCSE results.

The school accurately monitors its teaching and learning and its records, coupled with inspection evidence, show that the quality is good and improving. In most lessons, relationships between teachers and students are good; teachers are confident in their subjects and explain key points clearly. In the few cases where teaching is less effective it fails to meet completely the needs of all individuals in the class. This is usually because tasks are not planned for the full ability range. This can mean that sometimes the more able are not challenged sufficiently and/or lower attainers are not effectively supported. In the outstanding lessons observed, work was closely matched to ability and students were challenged to think creatively at pace, providing a real 'buzz' of engagement among students. Some parents reported concerns about low-level disruption in lessons and inspectors found this to sometimes be the case where teaching was less effective.

Many aspects of the school's work are good, including the personal development and well-being of its students. Relationships throughout the school are positive, and spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are good. Attendance is improving and above average. This is due to careful monitoring and intervention and students report that they enjoy their education. A strength of the school is the way it engages students through its specialist status. The school is notable for the extensive work done with local primary schools, where up to 100 students are involved in preparing for and teaching primary pupils' science lessons. This has many benefits, including the excellent opportunities to foster leadership skills. In a school where students report feeling safe, it is unsurprising that the pastoral care is strong. Transition

arrangements into Year 7 are very good and those to the sixth form are improving. A good work-related curriculum and the qualifications that most students achieve prepare them well for their next stages of education or employment. Academic guidance and intervention are improving and targets are being made more challenging for students. Tracking of individuals towards their targets is becoming increasingly effective.

Several parents comment on the positive and energetic work of the principal and the way he communicates with them but others are concerned at the direction the school is taking. The majority are supportive of the school's current work and future plans. There is a clear sense of the development of a shared direction and purpose among the staff. The senior team recognises that careful implementation of the collegiate plan, coupled with clear accountability of and development for middle leadership, is essential to smooth transition. This is due to the significantly revised roles that many will be undertaking and the fact that some subject leaders have been more successful than others in accelerating progress in their areas. Matters identified in the last inspection as requiring improvement have been addressed and leaders know their school and are determined to make it even better. This, in addition to current rising standards in all subject areas, demonstrates good capacity for making further improvements.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Riddlesdown has an inclusive sixth form with special extended provision for specific students where appropriate. As a result, recruitment and retention rates are increasing. Standards in the sixth form are rising. Individual progress is satisfactory but accelerating as the sixth form evolves. The newly appointed head of sixth has spread the management and accountability between the team leaders and tutors in Years 12 and 13, but it is too early to see the full impact of the changes. Following students' transition interview and induction, Year 12 and 13 receive good guidance from their tutors and the careers service to help them follow a suitable pathway that matches their needs. A satisfactory but improving curriculum offers an increasingly wide range of courses GCSE at AS and A Level, complemented by new OCR National courses in Travel and Tourism and Business. In some lessons inconsistency in planning to meet specific need, a lack of regular marking or feedback limit the impact of teaching on learning. However, outstanding learning and teaching are on offer in some subjects, for example drama, where flair in planning, using purposeful and challenging techniques, demands students' active involvement in their learning. Dedicated new sixth form resources in the library are used well to extend independent learning. Most tutors offer students very productive, one-to-one personal interviews on setting precise and challenging targets as well as time to discuss personal issues. Articulate and confident students were keen to explain the exceptional support given by the school; some students said, 'the pastoral support we have received has been amazing, especially if personal issues are influencing our studies'. Mature attitudes and leadership are encouraged through links with lower school students - giving reading support, working as mentors through the MacKay Skills Project and leading committees through a range of relevant topics such as the environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed and evolve increased curriculum choice in the main school and sixth form so that all students can follow courses of study that meet their needs.
- Ensure that all teaching challenges and supports the full range of learners so that students make consistently good progress across the curriculum in the main school and sixth form.

- Ensure that leaders at all levels develop the skills and clear accountability necessary for their new roles to ensure the success of the new structure.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter Riddlesdown with above average levels of attainment. The Year 11 cohort completing their GCSEs in 2008 made satisfactory progress overall during their time in the school to attain standards that were above the national average. Some groups of students in this year group, particularly lower-ability boys, made inadequate progress. This was in part due to a curriculum offer that did not meet all of their needs. The school has partially revised the Year 11 curriculum and a wider vocational offer for current students has meant that students are generally making faster progress and are on track to attain higher standards. This is particularly the case in mathematics where students make very good progress. Standards are also rising in science and English. However, in a small number of subjects students are not making the progress that they should due mainly to being on inappropriate courses. Progress during Key Stage 3 has been satisfactory in English, mathematics and science in previous years. Current school data and inspection evidence demonstrate that progress is beginning to accelerate across the curriculum. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made satisfactory progress in 2008. Current data show that while rates of progress are improving for many students, overall they remain satisfactory. Students with specific learning difficulties generally make faster progress on average than those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Effective support in the Mackay Skills Project is helping all students with an attendance 'slot' make faster progress, including those with English as an additional language.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' progress in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development during lessons and assemblies is good throughout the school. Year 10 were certainly made aware of poignant moral issues surrounding media involvement in the ending of life. They have good opportunities to think about human feelings and emotions, the way they impact on people and how understanding of them can be helpful. Attendance is good because tracking absence is keen; very few stay away from school for a long time. A parent writes, 'Our son easily settled in and enjoys his lessons and teachers'. Behaviour is satisfactory. Some parents and students are critical of the small minority who slow down learning. Students feel safe and know how to be so through the strong pastoral programme. They are also encouraged to live a healthy lifestyle and are pleased about the school's recent Healthy School Award. They say, 'There are lots of people we can talk to about problems', and older students work as mentors to younger ones. They take part in many community activities both in the school and outside as prefects, doing paired reading or as teachers in primary schools. Although school council members think that the school is sometimes slow to respond to their ideas, they feel they have made huge improvements and learnt important life skills. Students receive an effective grounding in work-related skills. This, coupled with a high standard of key skills, gives them a good basis to move on to the next stage in life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most of the day-to-day teaching is good. In the majority of lessons, relationships between teachers and students are good; teachers are confident in their subjects and explain key points clearly. Over the last 18 months, the school has introduced a programme to improve the quality of teaching - initially for Years 7 and 8. This is bringing benefits in many lessons in terms of a wider range of learning activities for students and also better levels of involvement in those activities. The effective use of interactive whiteboards is aiding engagement in some lessons. Nevertheless, these approaches are not yet consistently applied across the school and at times students are too passive and spend too long listening to teachers talking. In some of the very best lessons seen, very good use was made of features such as pair and group work, coupled with students assessing their own work against examination board criteria. Changes to the curriculum now mean that the range of ability in many classes is wider than before. Planning does not always take sufficient account of this, and tasks to either extend the more able or to support slower learners are not routinely built into lessons. When work is carefully matched to students' needs, as in a mathematics lesson observed during the inspection, outstanding progress can result. Students were challenged to higher levels of thinking and creativity through good pace and skilled questioning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, the school has significantly improved arrangements for work-related learning. Work experience is now in place for all students, enterprise activities have been introduced, and a group of about 20 students in each of Years 10 and 11 now attend vocational courses at the local college. As a whole, the school has undertaken a thorough, well-planned review of the curriculum. For students currently in Years 9 and 10 and those looking to study at Riddlesdown, the range of courses is now good and appropriate to needs and interests. This includes a suitable range of vocational alternatives to GCSE. However, the range of options available to students in the current Year 11, while an improvement on the previous year, is relatively constrained, with the result that some students are following courses which they are not best suited to. In a couple of subject areas this is leading to some students not having sufficiently positive attitudes to their learning and therefore not achieving as well as they should. The science specialism has had a positive impact on the take-up of science subjects and mathematics at A level and is encouraging students to go on to study science subjects in higher education. Very good use is made of the neighbouring North Downs to introduce students in a very practical way to nature conservation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students enjoy coming to school because they feel safe and well cared for. Parents favourably comment on the level of support their children receive. The school's work with vulnerable students is strong through the wide network of partnerships it has with specialist agencies like 'Off the Record' and initiatives such as 'Skill Force'. Students give high praise for the quality of provision experienced in the MacKay Skills Project. Here, learning difficulties are quickly diagnosed and responded to with the best form of help. Students thrive in its warm, friendly

atmosphere and say they can talk about anything to teachers and support staff. They also say that teachers are 'harsh on bullying' and that, 'The medical lady does a really good job!' Good care is given to those new to the school and at critical transition points to help them settle in quickly and easily. A parent comments, 'Induction in Year 7 was excellent and could not have been handled better'. Students are guided well in choosing subjects and courses, and in experiencing work placements. A Year 10 student, for example, was looking forward to mock job interviews. Safeguarding systems meet requirements and risk assessment is effective. Healthy lifestyles are persistently nurtured through personal, social and health education and physical activities. Students know their academic targets; most know how to work towards them and sometimes in precise ways, but this is not universally the case.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The principal, working with a strong senior team, is clearly focused on improvement. His vision, shared by the team, includes the planned division of this large school into smaller parallel colleges. However, there is an understanding that the approach presents many challenges in order to achieve the potential rewards. The principal knows that inconsistency of middle leadership must be minimised and accountability clearly defined for the new structure to fulfil its potential. Staff at all levels comment on the determination of the senior team to achieve this aim and raise standards. An accurate view of the strengths of the school and priorities for development has been established. Resources have been very well managed and good provision has been made for planned expenditure related to improvement of the site and reorganisation. Managers have adopted more challenging targets for students, and results based on work halfway through the current year show that learners on average are achieving better than cohorts from previous years. Managers' well-judged lesson observations and planned support are helping to improve the standard of teaching and learning across the school. The governors are beginning to consider the context of the school within a changing local and national population and plan and audit accordingly. Links forged with outside organisations, and the breadth of educational and social experiences available to students help to satisfactorily promote community cohesion. The governing body is supportive and well informed but has yet to proactively take responsibility for the overall direction of the school. Equal opportunity for all is a guiding principle at Riddlesdown. For example, the school is working effectively to support students from Afghanistan so that they can fully participate in the life of the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
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?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	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?	2	2

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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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	3	
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**

10 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Riddlesdown High School, Purley, CR8 1EX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting with you, and were particularly impressed by the pride you take in your school.

These are the main findings of our inspection.

- Riddlesdown High School provides you with a satisfactory standard of education.
- The sixth form is satisfactory but improving, with areas of its work that are good.
- Standards are rising and you are making faster progress in most subjects but in a small number progress remains too slow.
- The principal and other leaders know the school well. They have worked effectively to improve it while also developing plans for your new school structure.
- We agree with the principal and senior team that most lessons are good with some that are outstanding.
- The school works well with its partners to improve your personal development and well-being and because of this it is good.
- The school provides you with a satisfactory but improving curriculum offer and effective care, guidance and support.

The inspection team and the principal agree that you could achieve even higher standards and we have asked that:

- all lessons challenge and support your learning so that you make good progress in all of the subjects you study
- the school ensures that changes to the curriculum are embedded and further evolve to maximise opportunities for all of you to study suitable courses
- your school leaders bring about the best possible transition to the new structure.

You can do your part to help by ensuring that the small numbers of you who occasionally disrupt lessons stop doing so and that everybody makes their maximum effort at all times. The team joins me in sending you our best wishes for your studies and the hope that you all do very well in the future.

Yours faithfully

Peter Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector