

Emerson Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102340
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	323624
Inspection dates	3–4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Carmen Rodney 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	954
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jenny Bell
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Walsh
Date of previous school inspection	7 June 2006
School address	Wych Elm Road Hornchurch RM11 3AD
Telephone number	01708 475285
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Age group	11–16
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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

In this average sized secondary school, the vast majority of students are of White British heritage. Of the small number of students from other ethnic groups, the proportion speaking English as a second language is below average, with only a few at an early stage of learning English. The ratio of boys to girls is almost double in some year groups. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. A below average proportion of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The largest numbers of learners receiving support include those who have specific learning needs, moderate learning needs and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school has gained the Sportsmark Award and Artsmark Gold and was designated a sport college in September 2004.

The senior deputy headteacher was appointed as the acting headteacher in September 2008 before he was formally confirmed into the substantive post in April 2009. Under the guidance of the local authority, a partnership was formed with Abbs Cross School and Arts College, a local outstanding school. The executive headteacher acts as mentor and coach and provides support for the strategic leadership for the school. The close partnership model has been forged to help the school move forward. Following the reorganisation, a number of temporary posts were filled by supply teachers. Permanent appointments have been made for the start of the next academic year. Arrangements are in place to fill the vacant deputy headteacher's post from September 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Emerson Park is an improving school which provides a satisfactory education for its students. This judgement comes across strongly from responses to the parents' questionnaire and discussion with a group of them. One parent said, 'The headteacher is passionate about education and has a goal, which he is going for'. The school has a good partnership with parents and while they recognise that improvements have started, they are very positive about the school's provision for their children. Following the last inspection, there was a lengthy period when the quality of provision did not improve and the rate of students' progress declined. This static situation ended when the new headteacher introduced significant changes at the start of the new academic year.

The school's success in identifying the next steps needed to accelerate improvement is due to the good leadership and management of the headteacher. He has successfully grappled with complex matters linked to budget management and reorganisation. As a result, he has won the trust of the staff, students and parents and has been effective in increasing staff morale and creating a stable senior team who work well together and support each other. Together, they are promoting the school's development on many fronts and the senior managers are increasingly building up the skills of middle managers. The senior team has an accurate view of the school and is ambitious for all students to make better progress. At this stage of the school's development, systems for monitoring teaching and learning and evaluating provision are progressing but are not yet fully rigorous and it is too early to measure the impact on outcomes.

The school has good capacity for further improvement. The vision for the future has been supported by the exceptionally effective partnership work with the outstanding local school, a link brokered by the local authority. The partnership work is impacting positively on driving change, especially in relation to strategic planning, as the school is clear about the next steps for further improvement.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. The students' attitudes and behaviour in class and around the site are good. Students have responded positively to the improving provision and those who attend regularly enjoy learning. However, although the school has taken stringent steps, including legal action, to address poor attendance, a minority of students across all year groups still have poor attendance and the 2009 target for attendance was not met.

By the end of Years 9 and 11, standards are average overall. While GCSE results including English and mathematics have generally been above the national average for the last two academic years, standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 have not risen. Given students' starting points, their achievement is satisfactory. There is good emphasis on supporting lower-attaining students, such as those who have specific learning difficulties; however, there is insufficient challenge for the more able. The quality of teaching is satisfactory with some good features. The school is focused on improving teaching and leaders have set ambitious targets in all areas of the school's provision. The school recognises that there is still more to do to ensure that teaching is consistently good or better so that students make better progress.

The systems for assessing and monitoring the students' progress are satisfactory. The school now has a clear overview of students' progress and teachers are increasingly using the tracking system to spot and support those likely to fail to meet expectations. The assessment information

is also helping teachers to have higher expectations of students' achievement. However, while teachers are beginning to use data to inform target setting and intervention, the process is not fully established. The frequency and quality of marking is inconsistent. For example, although many students know their targets, they are not used consistently, marking does not give clear guidance, and presentation is often mediocre.

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of students. It provides them with a range of academic and vocational pathways that lead to the vast majority gaining accreditation and is a good basis for future learning. Plans are in place to extend the curriculum further, particularly with respect to the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) which is only just satisfactory. The school has successfully used its specialism in sports to make important contributions to improvements; the Sportsmark Award confirms the success of the school's work in developing students' leadership skills and some aspects of healthy lifestyles.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate the rate of students' progress, by ensuring that expectations are sufficiently high for the most able so that they are fully challenged and able to reach their full potential.
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning to at least good by ensuring that monitoring is evaluative and teachers can identify and use best practice, including a wider range of strategies to help students make rapid progress.
- Establish the use of assessment by giving students clear guidance through marking and target setting, and analysing and using data robustly to improve their progress.
- Implement the plans to improve the ICT provision by developing the resources and ensuring students and staff can use them across the curriculum.
- Improve the attendance of students who are frequently absent.

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 the school with standards that are slightly better than average. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are average. Over the last two years, results and teachers' assessments in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have been close to the national average although, in 2007, students' performance in English was significantly lower than their achievement in mathematics and science.

GCSE results have risen consistently since the time of the last inspection. In 2008, 58% of students attained five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. The school has been effective in helping the vast majority of students to achieve 5 or more A* to G grades at GCSE. Nevertheless, while the rate of improvement is above the national trend, the school did not achieve its ambitious targets and students did not perform consistently well in all subjects. The variability in performance is most noticeable among the more able students with too few not attaining the highest GCSE grades, A*/A, in too many subjects. In 2008, students attained above-average standards in science with notably strong performance in mathematics. Given their starting points, students' academic progress is satisfactory.

With the exception of lower-attaining boys, who made good progress, there is no significant difference in the achievement of different groups of students, including the small number of

students from minority ethnic groups and those whose mother tongue is not English. The school is aware that more needs to be done to ensure that all students can achieve their full potential. A range of additional intervention strategies has been provided to support students at risk of underachievement. Analysis of the school's 2009 GCSE predictions indicates an upward trend in performance. In 2008, the school achieved its specialist target.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school provides a friendly environment in which students can thrive, feel safe and are supported and able to discuss different issues in a sensitive way. Good provision for the students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has led to them responding well to the improving provision. In addition, there is a good range of sporting activities that extend the students' development.

Students enjoy their education but attendance is satisfactory. The school has good systems to tackle the persistent absentees and, as a result, the attendance of this group of students has improved significantly. However, a significant minority of students do not attend regularly. In lessons and around the school, behaviour is good but during the current academic year, exclusions have risen and good use has not been made of the inclusion unit. Students report that bullying is rare and if it does occur it is dealt with swiftly.

Students seize the opportunities available to them to develop their leadership skills in the school and in the local and wider community, including schools in the Philippines and Belize. Students use the Junior Sports Leader programme, the school council and the local Youth Parliament to influence decisions such as the redevelopment of the school canteen. Although students' understanding of healthy lifestyles is satisfactory, overall meal choices in the school canteen are not always healthy. Although students' ICT skills have been compromised by the previously poor system, and their progress in English is satisfactory, their good achievement in mathematics, the effective programme of personal and social education programme and substantial work experience and enterprise days mean they are well prepared for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Inspectors' evidence confirms the school's view that the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features. Whereas at Key Stage 4, teaching is more challenging and provides students with opportunities to engage in independent learning, it is predominantly satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9. However, in these years, students experience less active learning styles with fewer activities, especially for those who are more gifted and talented.

The most effective lessons include clear features such as challenging and aspirational learning objectives that motivate students to progress to the higher levels. In these lessons, practical and short-timed activities and talk are used well to engage students. Pace is brisk and there is continuous feedback and students make good progress as they are actively involved and can critically assess their work. In lessons that are otherwise satisfactory, teachers do not make the most of their good subject knowledge to captivate the students with in-depth questioning. In these lessons, the pace is slower, activities do not stimulate thinking sufficiently and there is

less emphasis on independent learning. There are inconsistencies in marking and the good quality marking evident in English is not widespread across other departments. Students' progress is compromised because there is insufficient attention to identifying how they can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall and is enhanced by the school's specialism and the wide range of enrichment activities. The sports specialism, as a main strength of the curriculum, is used widely to benefit all students. Specialist staff therefore use the sports curriculum well to model good classroom practice, support the local primary schools, increase students' personal development and to provide a distinctive health programme in the community that has attracted national acclaim.

At Key Stage 4, students follow an increasing range of pathways based on their identified needs and interests. Good links with local further education providers are enabling an increasing number of students to pursue for part of the time courses that are matched to their skills. A careful review of the curriculum has resulted in it being extended to include a wider range of choices in order to increase students' life chances. Provision for ICT is now satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Teachers are fully committed to the care of students. For example, students who arrive with little or no English are appropriately inducted into the school and the education system. Similarly, good attention is paid to helping students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and who are transferring to the school; the early intervention work contributes to them settling quickly when they enter the school. There is a good focus on providing advice, guidance and support as students move up the school.

Students and their parents agree that they are well looked after, feel safe and know who to approach if they are upset or worried. At present, the school is establishing new assessment systems and the planned programme to support students identified as gifted and talented is still new. There is careful attention to health and safety issues, including good child protection systems and all other safeguarding requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The major change in leadership affected the stability of the school. Within a short time of being appointed as acting headteacher and then being confirmed in post, the headteacher has successfully created stability by forging a cohesive senior team. He inspires loyalty and has worked tirelessly with the senior team to manage the reorganisation and change the culture of the school so that there is a sharp focus on fulfilling the aim of 'providing the best educational experience that is possible for all students at Emerson Park'. The headteacher has worked very well with external partners, including the executive headteacher and the local authority. Strategic planning has improved because the headteacher welcomes support and discussion and this encourages leaders at all levels to embrace and use change for the benefit of the students. Consequently, the school has begun to use reviews to develop its practice.

The school has come a long way in introducing and developing suitable systems to monitor and evaluate provision. This has led to all staff gaining a better understanding of the headteacher's vision for accelerating students' progress further. Teaching is now monitored and evaluated, though at this stage in developing the new systems, there is insufficient rigour to ensure that feedback is evaluative and producing more good or better teaching. Senior leaders are increasingly developing the capacity of middle managers to use assessment information to track progress. At present, there is still more work to do to make sure that data are used analytically to ensure that all groups achieve equally well. Middle leaders are more accountable through line management meetings, although at this stage, self-reviews are not sufficiently evaluative to maintain a sharper focus on the next steps. Currently, cultural diversity is promoted but wider aspects of community cohesion have still to be developed.

Governance of the school is satisfactory. The governors are now better placed to provide a blend of challenge and support for the school. Training has been used to refresh the governors' understanding of their duties, and the close partnership with the local authority and the outstanding provider has contributed to them knowing exactly how they should plan and monitor the school's work. A good example is the way they are now using their expertise to ensure that systems are known, updated and reviewed regularly. For example, they regulate the budget and oversee a wide range of procedures, including the race equality and equal opportunity policies.

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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
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Emerson Park School, Hornchurch, RM11 3AD

Thank you for helping us with the inspection. We were impressed with your calm manner and enjoyed meeting and talking with you. You are right to be insistent when explaining why you enjoy your school, and your parents are very pleased that you go there. Your positive attitudes help to make it a happy and safe place.

Emerson Park School is improving because the headteacher is very determined to make it even better so that you can all do your best. He is very well supported by the senior staff and other leaders, including the governors. Together, they have worked very hard to make sure that Emerson Park recovered from a difficult period. We were impressed with the headteacher's clear directions to staff on what everyone needs to do to help you make better progress. We therefore judged Emerson Park to be a satisfactory and improving school.

These are the main strengths that we found in your school.

- By the end of Year 11, most of you reach good standards in mathematics and science.
- The sports specialism is used effectively to help you do well, not only in physical education but also in other areas of the school's life and in making a good contribution to working as role models in the local primary schools.
- Partnership work with other schools and agencies is helping your school to broaden its approach to improving provision.
- The school provides a safe and caring environment.
- The senior team knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school very well and is using this knowledge to introduce new systems to improve provision.

There are many things that are already improving and the leaders and managers have some good ideas about the next steps to make things even better. The inspectors left the senior team with a number of things to work on. First, the majority of you could make better progress. Second, when senior and middle managers observe lessons, they could identify ways for making them even better. Third, assessment information and targets are not always used well and marking does not always include clear comments to help you know how you can improve your work. Fourth, the provision for ICT is not well developed and, fifth, your attendance is better but some of you do not attend regularly. You can all help by continuing to work together and support your school to make it even better.

Yours faithfully

Carmen Rodney

Her Majesty's Inspector