

# Little Heath School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110063
<b>Local Authority</b>	West Berkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	325093
<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 February 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Scott HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1697
Sixth form	399
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Jean Charmak
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Ramsden
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	16 November 2005
<b>School address</b>	Little Heath Road Tilehurst Reading RG31 5TY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01189 427 337
<b>Fax number</b>	01189 421 933

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Little Heath School is a larger than average oversubscribed comprehensive school with a large sixth form. It has specialist college status in mathematics and science and in 2008 gained a second specialism as a high performing specialist school for 'raising achievement transforming learning'. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is low. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language is below average. The proportion of students with a learning difficulty and/or disability is slightly below average and there are fewer students with statements of special educational needs than nationally.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Little Heath School provides an outstanding education for its students. Provision and outcomes in the large sixth form are exceptional. What is truly striking about the school is its exemplary care, guidance and support which underpin the outstanding personal development of its students. The school is inclusive and effectively promotes opportunities for all learners. There is a positive ethos, successfully encouraging students to think of their learning as a continuous journey from the age of 11 to 18 and beyond. Students leave the sixth form exceptionally well prepared for life after Little Heath School.

The school identifies the needs of individuals very well, appropriately targeting support and encouragement so that standards reached by students are above average. Students make good progress in Years 7 to 11 and outstanding progress in the sixth form. Year leaders demonstrate a determination and passion in ensuring that all students are valued and have opportunities to do well. The headteacher demonstrates outstanding leadership and has a clear vision for the school. He is able to build on the many strengths already present. Along with outstanding leaders at all levels the school has refined its development plans well with a clear focus on the key priorities to ensure continued and increasing success for students. The headteacher recognises that more intensive monitoring is now required to lift the quality of teaching to a more consistently high level. Greater strength in the governance of the school is needed, particularly with respect to monitoring the effectiveness of statutory policies.

Students' interests are at the heart of decision-making at Little Heath School. This results in outstanding care, guidance and support and outstanding personal development and well-being. Students are widely consulted and their views are valued and considered. They have contributed to the development of policies and to improving teaching and learning, for example through the learning group pilot. Here, students meet to discuss their learning and how the school can help to improve it. However, the school's analysis of the effectiveness of initiatives designed to improve aspects of teaching and learning is not always sharp enough, so the school cannot say which have made most impact. Many parents have highlighted the exceptionally caring nature of the school. One parent summed this up when commenting, 'I am very impressed with the dedication of teaching staff who genuinely care about the children.' The outstanding curriculum is continually developing and is very well adapted to the needs of students and the increasing numbers of students in the sixth form. The school provides an exceptional range of extra-curricular activities. Leaders and managers are not complacent and continue to look to increase the range of pathways to match the needs of students both now and in the future. A few parents raised concerns about the quality of accommodation and behaviour. The school is rightly giving priority in its planning to improve this.

The school has been very successful in raising attainment in its specialist subjects of science and mathematics. It has also seen excellent uptake of these subjects at A level. The school promotes community cohesion well through its work with other schools and links with the local community. Little Heath provides support to partner schools through its 'raising achievement transforming learning' specialism. It is sensitive to the needs of its partner schools as well as its increasing role in leading initiatives nationally through the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding in the impact it has on students' personal development and well-being and on the exceptional progress they make. The proportion of students who achieve at the highest levels is increasing with over half of them achieving A to B grades in 2008. Some subjects demonstrate highly impressive performance, for example in health and social care, where a few students were among the highest achievers nationally. A striking feature of the sixth form is its effectiveness in supporting students to enable them to meet and exceed challenging targets. The exceptionally good progress that students make is underpinned by outstanding teaching and learning, strong provision of care, guidance and support for each student and continually improving, excellent personalised curriculum provision. Outstanding provision is reflected in the sixth form's growth, increased popularity and high retention rates. This poses its own challenges for the school to ensure that restrictions imposed by current accommodation are overcome. Nonetheless, the sixth form provides outstanding value for money in relation to its current use of resources. The success of the sixth form is a direct result of exceptionally strong leadership, excellent relationships between staff and students and the positive attitudes to learning by very committed, articulate and mature sixth-formers. Sixth-formers make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community, for instance, in their organisation of a highly successful annual Christmas party for over a hundred senior citizens.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the impact of school governance particularly with respect to monitoring the impact of statutory policies.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning further with sharper monitoring and analysis of lessons and initiatives.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Students join the school with broadly average standards and leave with above average standards. They make good progress in Key Stage 3 and standards in English, mathematics and science are above average at the end of Year 9. Good progress continues in Key Stage 4. Results at GCSE in 2008 showed that 28% of grades for all subjects were A\* or A compared to just over 18% nationally. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics is above average. GCSE results for subjects such as history, drama and music were notably high. Students enter the sixth form with broadly average standards relative to other sixth forms, although many of them achieved GCSE D grades. This reflects the inclusive approach the school takes in promoting further studies for all students. They make outstanding progress in the sixth form and over half of the students achieved A or B Grades at A level. There is a very high degree of consistency across all subjects and courses in the sixth form.

The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are carefully identified and effectively provided for and, consequently, they make as much progress as their peers. The school has improved the way in which it identifies the needs of these students and plans appropriate help for them.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Students' great enjoyment and appreciation of the school is reflected in their good attendance and willingness to participate both in lessons and in a wide range of enrichment activities. Students' behaviour is good, resulting in a calm and purposeful atmosphere throughout the school. Relationships between staff and students are based on mutual respect and care. Students say that they feel safe and they report that bullying and racial incidents are rare and dealt with effectively once made known to a teacher. Older students provide very good role models as mentors as part of the 'Smile Team' and are actively involved in safeguarding younger students, especially the more vulnerable. The behaviour of sixth form students is outstanding and they are excellent role models for younger students. The well-planned personal social health education (PSHE) and citizenship programme and themed assemblies contribute to students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and help them become well-rounded, responsible citizens.

The school regards its students as 'partners in learning' and, as a result, the school council has been allowed to develop into a highly active forum for raising issues and concerns. Students feel valued as their views are taken seriously in, for example, the recent 'Student Voice' conference when they discussed and evaluated different styles of teaching and learning. Students' high degree of involvement in community projects, fundraising activities and musical performances at charity events makes an excellent contribution to the wider community. Good progress has been made on healthy eating. The students' determination to adopt healthy lifestyles is reflected in their good participation in the wide variety of sporting activities and in their willingness to choose healthy options at lunchtimes. Curricular provision for physical education is, however, below recommended levels at Key Stage 4. Through well-established business links, information and communication and technology skills, careers guidance and the skills developed through their high level of involvement in decision-making, students are very well prepared for their future economic well-being.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Most teaching and learning is typically good or better. A significant proportion is outstanding. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, with lessons containing a good variety of activities closely matched to individual needs. Teachers often use questions well to extend students' thinking and encourage them to consider deeply and answer at length. Older students are encouraged to analyse exam board marking criteria to help them answer questions as well as they can. Inspectors observed outstanding teaching that demonstrated some excellent use of group work to support learning and also really lively engagement of students through whole-class discussion. Students make most progress when lessons actively engage and challenge them, providing opportunities for independent learning.

In the sixth form, teaching and learning are outstanding. This is because teachers are very aware of, and respond to, the individual needs of students and also because students themselves are developing first-rate attitudes to learning both within and beyond the classroom. The increased opportunity for independent work, where students are taking greater responsibility for their own learning, is also an important factor.

Despite the many strengths in teaching, there remain some weaknesses. For instance, teachers occasionally talk for too long and do not ensure a close enough match of task to student abilities. In these cases, students sometimes lose interest. Inconsistencies in marking mean that students are not always given specific advice on how to improve their work. Effective self-evaluation means that school leaders are aware of these issues and plan sharper and more rigorous monitoring of lessons to improve teaching to still higher levels.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

Little Heath provides an outstanding, broad and balanced curriculum which matches the need of students very well. Since the last inspection, the programme for PSHE has improved considerably, contributing to the excellent personal development of students. The option scheme at Key Stage 4 is flexible and provides a broad range of courses for students. Within department areas, this flexibility is developed further to respond more closely to individual needs. The very good opportunities for alternative provision at Key Stage 4 are attracting a growing number of students. An outstanding aspect of the curriculum is the quality of what is offered in the specialist subjects of mathematics and science. This has led to a high uptake of A-level courses combined with excellent achievement. In addition, the well-chosen vocational options in the sixth form have helped many students progress very well indeed, often from modest starting points, for example in health and social care. The range of extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities make an excellent contribution to students' personal development, with high rates of participation, for example in sport and in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The school recognises that there is scope to further develop aspects of its provision, for example in building on its success with vocational courses. The school has clear plans to ensure the curriculum continues to offer students opportunities to excel.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

This is a highly inclusive school where students confirm that they feel secure as there are always adults available to give excellent support whether their needs are academic, personal or emotional. The skilful way that tutors build trusting relationships with their students is fundamental to the high levels of care observed during the inspection and permeates every aspect of school life. Child protection procedures and health and safety practices are secure and regularly reviewed. Excellent links with feeder schools ensure a smooth transition for all newcomers to the school. Students who need additional help with their learning are very well supported through appropriate intervention and make good progress as a result. Vulnerable and looked after students are carefully monitored, and the school uses outside agencies, such as counselling services, very well to give these students the support that they need. The school's learning support and 'Success Plus' units are highly effective in supporting students with behavioural and emotional needs and those at risk of exclusion.

Academic guidance and the tracking of students' progress are well-established routines in the school. Those who are not making sufficient progress are identified early and given appropriate support. All students are tracked to ensure the appropriate help and support is implemented at an early stage. However, the analysis of the impact of the school's many initiatives and interventions on the achievements of different groups of pupils is not yet consistent. Students are given clear advice when making option choices and have good access to careers guidance. The school's robust system for monitoring attendance and close working relationship with

parents and carers have maintained and improved students' above-average attendance rate. This significantly contributes to their good academic achievement and outstanding personal development.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher and school leaders know the school well and have identified the areas that will make the greatest impact in increasing the impressive progress the school has been making. The school makes the best use of its accommodation and strives successfully to ensure a positive learning environment is sustained for all students. It is effective in managing these constraints and prioritising the demands of expansion and diversification of provision.

Leaders have evaluated strengths and weaknesses accurately. Having correctly identified weaknesses in the quality of lesson monitoring, the headteacher has taken steps to improve consistency, evaluation and identification of areas for development. Leaders at all levels contribute very well to setting and meeting challenging targets and identifying a clear direction for improvement. The school has a well-focused development plan and is pragmatic in its approach, with students' needs central to decision-making. Heads of year are instrumental in leading the intervention strategies appropriate for students in their year group and monitor progress of all students carefully to ensure no student is forgotten. The school contributes to the profile of national leadership by sharing their good and outstanding practice, particularly through the specialist college forums and its second specialism in raising achievement transforming learning.

Governors demonstrate admirable dedication and commitment to the school. They show a determination to hold the school more to account through a wider range of monitoring in order that they play their part in improving the school further. However, they have not monitored closely enough the action plans relating to statutory 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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	1
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**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
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	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	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**

18 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Little Heath School, Reading, RG31 5TY

I would like to thank you for assisting us with the inspection of your school. We think that overall the school is outstanding. You gave us clear views about how much you enjoy school and how you think things can get even better.

The leadership of the school is outstanding. You work well with your teachers and the mutual respect helps to maintain the positive atmosphere and cooperative culture in the school. You reach higher than average standards, making at least good progress. Those of you in the sixth form make outstanding progress. The curriculum is outstanding and you must continue working with the school through student voice to ensure it stays that way and continues to meet your needs. Your personal development and the care, support and guidance provided are excellent.

The majority of your lessons are good or better and a significant proportion are outstanding. Students in the sixth form have adopted a very positive attitude to learning and this helps them to make outstanding progress. Well done to the sixth form students who are also good role models for the rest of the school. We recognise that some of you find some lessons not interesting enough, particularly when teachers talk for too long and lessons do not offer enough challenge. The school has been asked to continue its work in improving lessons. You can play your part in this by working more independently, behaving well and continuing with your positive attitudes to learning. We have also asked the school to evaluate more sharply how groups of you are getting on and the impact of the many initiatives in the school.

You have a very dedicated governing body that works hard for the school. We would like the governors to play a bigger role in questioning the school and monitoring the impact of policies to help the school improve further.

I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Paul Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector