

Robert May's School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 116477 |
| Local Authority | Hampshire |
| Inspection number | 326407 |
| Inspection dates | 10–11 February 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Peter Gale HMI |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 1224 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs J Pratt |
| Headteacher | Mrs S Rafter |
| Date of previous school inspection | 8–9 February 2006 |
| School address | West Street Odiham Hook RG29 1NA |
| Telephone number | 01256 702700 |
| Fax number | 01256 703012 |

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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 38 lessons, and held meetings with the Chair of Governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, risk assessments, policy documents, students' books and 368 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Whether all groups of students in the school make good progress.
- The leadership team's capacity to bring about further improvement.
- Whether the school's provision is equally effective for the full range of abilities.
- How strong the outcomes are in the school for all groups of students including the most vulnerable.

Information about the school

Robert May's is a large, popular school for 11 to 16-year-olds. It serves the villages of Odiham, Hook and Hartley Wintney and a wide surrounding area covering 100 square miles. Most students are of White British heritage and there are very few from other backgrounds or whose first language is not English. The number of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school has specialist science status combined with mathematics and information and communication technology. There is an attached resourced unit for 12 students with autistic spectrum disorder.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Robert May's School provides an outstanding educational experience clearly focused on the rounded development of the whole student. Care, support and guidance for all students are at the heart of everything that it does. As the parent of one student in the resourced unit stated, supported by many others, 'absolutely brilliant school, care is second to none'.

Students enter the school with above-average prior attainment and make good progress in their time in the school to attain high standards. Learning in class is generally good due to effective teaching. However, there is some variation in the quality across and within departmental areas. It is consistently strongest in science, humanities and modern foreign languages. The school is aware that a higher proportion of good lessons are needed in mathematics. Another area highlighted by inspection activity as inconsistent is the quality of day-to-day assessment through verbal and written feedback.

Progress has been, and continues to be, fastest for the most and least able. For the most able this is due to an outstanding curriculum that provides fantastic opportunities to be stretched both in school, in partner institutions and through the vast range of extra-curricular activities that take place at the end of the compressed school day. For the least able, curriculum opportunities and specialised support account for faster than average progress. Vulnerable students, including those from traveller backgrounds and those in care, are very well supported and integrated so that they make progress in line with their peers. Those in the resourced unit make very good progress.

Overall, students behave exceptionally well in and out of lessons. Students report that mutually respectful relationships are the greatest strength of this harmonious community. This helps to explain why personal development outcomes are so strong.

Leaders at all levels have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development that are grounded in careful data analysis. They know that their focus needs to be even more clearly on the progress of individuals as well as the attainment of cohorts. This has recently led them to set more challenging targets for individuals. Careful and effective tracking enables the school to provide intervention with the few students not on track to meet their targets. This, coupled with sustained strength across all the outcomes, demonstrates good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Focus leadership and management at all levels on accelerating progress by ensuring:
 - consistency in the use of day-to-day marking and assessment to help students understand what they need to do to improve
 - teaching and learning are consistently good in mathematics
 - that all middle-attaining students reach their challenging targets.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

Students' achievement is good. While attainment is high overall and progress is good, the school acknowledges that some students, particularly in the middle ability group, could make faster progress. In a large majority of lessons observed by inspectors behaviour was exemplary and engagement with learning was palpable. Students' relationships with teaching staff are excellent and an atmosphere of trust allows them to respond very positively to challenges set. Their excellent relationships with each other mean collaborative learning is particularly successful. In the best lessons careful matching of the work to individual need and a variety of tasks ensure rapid progress. Where learning is slowed, it is usually because the same tasks are being set for the whole class and some students find them too easy and others too difficult. Occasionally there is too little time for students to reflect on questions asked and learning opportunities are missed.

Students achieve high grades in more subjects than in most schools. Progress has been and continues to be good in Key Stage 3 with almost all students meeting or exceeding nationally expected levels in English, mathematics and science. At GCSE 80% of students achieved five A* to C grades in 2008 and accurate school tracking demonstrates that this will rise in 2009. Some problems with entry to the correct examination tier in mathematics depressed the number of students achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics last year. However, having resolved this issue, the school, confidently expects a rise to 72% in 2009. As a result of high standards, outstanding attendance and punctuality and effective work-related programmes, virtually every student gains excellent life skills and goes on to education, training or employment. No group significantly underachieves because the school works hard with individuals and specialist support ensures that any who are 'struggling' in any way are supported in their learning to make good progress.

Students, including those who are vulnerable, feel very safe in the school and adopt safe ways of working in practical subjects. Bullying is said to be 'very rare' and parents and students say it is quickly and effectively dealt with. Although the uptake of sporting activities is high and most students adopt healthy lifestyles, parents and students alike identify this as an area where outcomes could be improved for some. The excellent curriculum and extra-curricular activities give all students a large range of opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community, which they readily accept in large numbers. Similarly, activities like building links with a school in

Rwanda, environmental groups, peer mentoring, the large choir and a host of others, facilitate outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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|---|---|
| Pupils' attainment ¹ | 1 |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress | 2 |
| The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress | 2 |
| How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning? | 2 |
| To what extent do pupils feel safe? | 1 |
| How well do pupils behave? | 1 |
| To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles? | 2 |
| To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community? | 1 |
| Pupils' attendance | 1 |
| How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being? | 1 |
| What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development? | 1 |

The quality of the school's work

Common features of the good-quality teaching seen by inspectors were excellent subject knowledge, very high expectations and enthusiasm from teachers and hence excellent relationships with and response from students. Science teaching is characterised by a high level of practical work which students enthusiastically respond to and which creates a real buzz of excitement. This 'buzz' was also evident in humanities, modern foreign languages (where excellent use of target language is a feature) and some excellent teaching seen in English. Due to the trust between teachers and students, opportunities to work in collaborative small groups are provided and enthusiastically seized. A few lessons are more pedestrian in their pace and lack challenge for all students in the class. This can lead to some students being off task and not making the progress they could. A general inconsistency is in the quality of oral and more particularly written feedback on progress provided to students across the curriculum on a day-to-day basis. Written feedback ranges from highly effective levelling of tasks with clear guidance on how to move to higher levels to cursory ticking with no comment. In some subject areas peer and self-assessment with clear criteria are used well to help students move on, but again this is not consistently the case.

Staff know their students extremely well and track their progress with care through regular assessment. This means that students receive targeted support should they fall behind or encounter barriers to their learning. Sometimes this support is related to learning, but exceptional care means that it can also be related to other difficulties experienced in students' lives such as getting into school. The needs of all, including

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

those who are in care of the council, the few from traveller and minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are themselves carers, are very well met.

The curriculum is under constant and careful review to ensure the best possible experience for all students. This means that the aspirations and needs of all are well met. The gifted and talented programme allowing the study of early GCSE and multiple options after school and off-site is well embedded and even encompasses AS-level critical thinking. Alternative provision for those in danger of disengagement with the normal curriculum is well established. Students and parents alike say that the provision of extra-curricular sport and enrichment is fantastic. The excellent curriculum is central to the outstanding outcomes for students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| High quality teaching and purposeful learning | 2 |
| Effective assessment | 2 |
| An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations | 1 |
| Support, guidance and care | 1 |

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a clear drive from a dedicated headteacher, respected by staff, students and parents alike, to improve all aspects of the school. Recent expansion of the senior team is providing extra capacity to focus more effectively on improving teaching and learning and on refining the school's tracking and intervention systems. The specialist status departments are taking a lead in the development of tracking systems. These have the potential to ensure all students make good progress. Target-setting has recently been made more challenging for individual students and tracking and intervention are beginning to ensure targets are consistently reached. Self-evaluation and planning for whole-school improvement are embedded fully. However, not all departmental plans are fully aligned with key whole-school priorities. This means that the impact of middle leadership is more efficient in some curriculum areas than others.

The promotion of respect and valuing others is at the heart of the school's ethos. The school fulfils all statutory duties in terms of equalities and, in practice, policies work very well. However, the direct impact of actions has not been fully audited to assess effectiveness. Safeguarding procedures are robust but could be more systematic in implementation. Risk assessments are detailed and students and parents are very positive about safety in general. The governing body is well led and fully involved in evaluating the work of the school and involving parents. In the past it has focused too much on attainment over individual progress. The school community is both cohesive and harmonious. Strong links with the local and wider community the school serves and its constituents are making a valuable contribution to cohesion. The very strong outcomes for students coupled to efficient resource allocation in a cramped site demonstrate outstanding value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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|---|---|
| Communicating ambition and driving improvement | 2 |
| Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination | 2 |
| Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective | 2 |
| Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met | 2 |
| Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being | 1 |
| Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services | 2 |
| Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion | 2 |
| Deploying resources to achieve value for money | 1 |

Views of parents and carers

The parents of nearly one third of the school population responded to the Ofsted questionnaire despite inclement weather making distribution and return difficult for some. Their responses show high levels of satisfaction with the work of the school. The majority of the small numbers of parental criticisms were offered constructively and where inspectors agree that these concerns are indeed issues, they are included in the main body of the report. Parents may wish to know there were no particular trends in those received.

What inspection judgements mean

| Grade | Judgement | Description |
|---------|--------------|---|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding. |
| Grade 2 | Good | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good. |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate. |

Common terminology used by inspectors

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| Attainment: | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. |
| Progress: | the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started. |
| Achievement: | an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory. |
| Capacity to improve: | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement. |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school. |



3 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Robert May's School, Odiham, RG29 1NA

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when it 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 points we liked about your school.

- Robert May's School provides you with an outstanding educational experience.
- The care, guidance and support you receive are fantastic and help you develop as well-rounded people who behave really well and value the excellent relationships with teachers and each other.
- The headteacher and other leaders know the school well. They are working effectively to improve it further.
- We agree with the headteacher and senior team that most lessons are good and this is helping you make good progress and gain excellent qualifications.
- The school provides you with a superb curriculum and the opportunities to experience a fantastic range of extra-curricular activities.

The inspection team and the headteacher agree that although your school is outstanding, it could be even better, and we have asked that the school's leaders ensure:

- teachers consistently provide you with the best possible feedback, both verbal and written, to help you do even better in your studies
- teaching and learning in mathematics are consistently good
- all students, including those in the middle sets, reach their challenging targets.

You can do your part to help by ensuring that you continue to behave outstandingly well in lessons and work hard. The team joins me in sending you best wishes for your studies and we hope that you all do very well in the future.

Yours faithfully

Peter Gale
Her Majesty's Inspector

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