

Roundwood Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117520
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326637
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1168
Sixth form	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Moira Hart
Headteacher	Mr Nick Daymond
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2006
School address	Roundwood Park Harpenden Hertfordshire AL5 3AE
Telephone number	01582 765344
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is situated in an area of comparatively favourable socio-economic circumstances. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average. The proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs is also very low and fewer than half the average found nationally has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The great majority of students are from White British backgrounds.

The school was awarded specialist status for mathematics and computing in 2003 and, as a high achieving specialist school, has more recently been awarded a second specialism, for modern foreign languages.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Roundwood Park School is an outstanding school. This is because of the strong educational philosophy which guides its work, the high quality of its self-evaluation and the rigour of its work to bring about improvement. The leadership and management of the school are outstanding and the governing body provides exceptional support, challenge and direction to the school's work. The school's capacity to improve is outstanding.

The parents who expressed an opinion to inspectors were full of praise for the school's work, in particular the progress that students make, their safety and behaviour and the way in which the school is led and managed.

The school has a very strong commitment to both students' personal development and their high educational achievement. There is a strong determination that all individuals will benefit. This is exemplified by the way in which the school uses its very detailed monitoring of the academic and personal progress that students make. Data about academic progress, together with information about attendance and behaviour, are exceptionally well used to identify the nature of support which students may need. There are, for example, for those who would benefit, programmes to enhance students' confidence, self-esteem and assertiveness, as well as programmes to develop their basic skills. Students of any ability who may be falling behind are quickly identified and there is a system of proportionate support, its intensity depending upon the extent of the underachievement. The school's monitoring of the effectiveness of these arrangements is thorough and frequent. Personal programmes for each student are evaluated fortnightly. The results show that they have a good impact and that it is outstanding in some respects. For students whose academic progress justifies it, there is the opportunity to take some examinations early. For example, in Year 9 one group is taking German and another group is taking French GCSE. Some other students are also entered early for GCSE mathematics. The result of the school's analysis of data is that students make outstanding progress in their work and personal development, reaching exceptionally high standards.

There is an unusually strong culture of self-evaluation and continuous improvement. Evaluations are detailed and penetrating, though with some variation in quality. For example, the self-evaluations of some of the subject departments are not all of the same high standard. In addition, although the school is aware of the extent to which different groups of students, including those who are eligible for free school meals, are involved in enrichment activities, such as school trips, the use of this information to bring about improvements is in some respects at a relatively early stage. For this reason, the school's contribution to community cohesion, which is outstanding in other respects, is good overall.

Students are very well taught, often by visiting speakers, about healthy lifestyles and how to stay safe. The school follows up this teaching by, for example, providing clear nutritional guidance for its meals, with a reward given according to the healthiness of students' choices. Close attention is paid to how much exercise students take at school. All do at least two hours per week of physical activity and for many this is supplemented by after school sports clubs. The result of this is that students have an outstanding understanding of healthy lifestyles and say that they feel safe.

Levels of enjoyment are high. This is encouraged by the consistently good or outstanding teaching they receive and by the harmonious and mature relationships which students have with each other and with their teachers. The curriculum too helps to promote enjoyment. Those

whose aspirations and talents are more helped by work-based approaches are able to attend a college for specialist teaching for part of the week. There are also thoroughly planned opportunities for students to develop skills for life and future employability, such as those to do with speaking, listening and presenting. The exceptionally high standards students reach in literacy and mathematics, and their excellent ability to work both in groups as well as individually, mean that their preparation for future life is outstanding.

Students are highly active in making a positive contribution to the community, including teaching older local citizens the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

The school's specialist status is used outstandingly well. It has a strong impact on its overall effectiveness.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding because of high quality leadership. Standards are exceptionally high and much better than would be expected on the basis of students' GCSE results alone. Achievement is therefore outstanding. There is a high proportion of students who achieve the highest grades A and B, both at A and AS level, though with some variability between subjects. The sixth form centre provides very good resources for learning. Retention rates in the sixth form are excellent and almost all who wish to, progress to university or other forms of higher education. Teaching and learning are highly effective. The curriculum is outstanding. Within the sixth form consortium arrangements there is an extensive range of academic and vocational subjects which meet the aspirations of all students, including those who seek Oxbridge entry. There is a high level of participation in enrichment activities. Compulsory general studies is used very well as a vehicle for delivering citizenship, personal, social and health education, alcohol and drugs awareness and aspects of study skills. Sixth formers receive excellent support and guidance. They are excellent role models for younger students, whom they often mentor or coach. Academic support is outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that self-evaluation is of outstanding quality throughout the school and that it has the necessary impact on personal development, through enrichment activities, of all groups of students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

In the GCSE examinations in recent years, with the exception of 2008, the standards which students have reached have been exceptionally high. This represents good progress, given students' above average starting points in Year 7. In 2008, standards were above average while standards in English were exceptional and good in mathematics. An analysis of the work currently being done by students, along with the results of external assessments, such as science modules, shows that standards are currently exceptionally high and students' achievement is outstanding. Students of all abilities make at least good progress, as do students from different minority ethnic groups. In lessons too, there is exceptional progress being made.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students are confident and highly articulate with very high levels of self-esteem. Inspectors observed very positive attitudes and outstanding behaviour throughout the inspection. There is a calm, mature and friendly atmosphere and students readily support each other in lessons and around the school. Students say that there is very little bullying in school and that they feel safe. They speak confidently about the strategies they have learned to keep themselves out of harm's way.

Students adopt healthy lifestyles and have positive attitudes. They enjoy a wide range of sporting activities and clubs are well attended. Students make a very active contribution to the community with, for example, a good range of music and performing arts concerts through the year. On a wider scale they take part in a number of charitable events and form groups to raise funds to support the provision of fresh water in a part of Africa.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding. A very high proportion of lessons is good or outstanding. No inadequate lessons were observed and the school's own monitoring suggests that there is no inadequate teaching. Lessons are consistently well planned and effectively take into account students' previous learning. Teachers have very high expectations and demonstrate very good subject knowledge. Students respond positively to the consistently high level of challenge and pace of learning. They are well behaved, enjoy their learning and make outstanding progress. They develop excellent study skills and are successful in becoming effective independent learners.

In many lessons, ICT is used effectively to present materials, share information and support learning. Inspectors observed some excellent question and answer sequences which encouraged students to reflect on and expand their knowledge. Good use is made of discussion and there is some very good assessment of each other's work by students. In a small number of lessons observed, the work set was too limited for the faster learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum provides very effectively for the academic and personal development of all learners. In Years 7, 8 and 9 it is enriched with additional units and themes, to develop speaking and listening, team working and other social and work-place skills. The school ensures that all subjects contribute effectively to students' cultural development. There is a comprehensive range of enrichment activities which help to develop students' cultural, spiritual and social skills. All students study at least one modern foreign language, as part of the specialist status.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's aim to help students to develop well both personally and academically is translated into very effective actions. The planning for the support of Year 7 students begins before the

students enter the school and is based on excellent relationships with the primary schools. The school has excellent working relationships with all support agencies and is able, where necessary, to augment that expertise because of the well-planned professional development programmes designed to enhance the skills of the staff. Students in Year 9 and 11 receive expert guidance which leads them to choose courses that are very well matched to their needs. Students who find learning difficult are similarly very well supported. The school is very effective in providing a safe and supportive place where all students feel safe, can thrive and grow into confident and self motivated learners. Student mentors are trained to support the few students who feel bullied and students say that this is part of a highly effective anti-bullying strategy. They are taught about the perils of cyber bullying. The school complies with safeguarding requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school's leaders, both staff and governors, have a very clear commitment to developing each individual student's academic and personal development to the greatest extent possible. This permeates the work of the school. As part of ensuring that this happens there are regular, dispassionate and accurate evaluations of the school's approaches and their impact on learners. For example, the provision made for a group of students who attend college courses for part of the week, has been modified to ensure that they are better integrated into the life of the school when they return. The work of subject departments is rigorously reviewed every two years and this has demonstrable impact in terms of the quality of the departments' work. In addition, all areas of the school evaluate their work once per year. This is a relatively new process and while there are some variations in quality, it nevertheless contains some important detail, for example the progress made by most groups of students. The school's leaders are well supported and held to account by regular meetings with their managers. This helps to keep the work of the school successfully coordinated and monitored. Governors provide strong support and challenge for the school. They are highly involved in working with the school and also in maintaining its direction and ethos. The school's strategic planning is clear and well-focused.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
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	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

15 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Roundwood Park School, Harpenden, AL5 3AE

Thank you for your help when we inspected your school recently. We found you to be a mature, polite and helpful group of young people who are at ease when speaking with adults.

Your school is outstanding. This is because it is governed by a strong philosophy: a strong belief that each of you should make excellent progress in your work and in your personal development. Your school's leaders do much to check that what the school offers you is of very good quality and is fully effective in helping you to develop. We found that the quality of teaching is outstanding and that is why you reach excellent standards in your work. Your school's approach to supporting you is also outstanding. Much is done to check that you are learning as well as you should be and that you are taking advantage of all the school has to offer. The care, guidance and support your school provides are also outstanding. Those of you who are not making the progress you ought to be are provided with a lot of help. You are well taught about health and safety matters. The curriculum is well designed and fully takes into account the fact that you have different interests and abilities.

Your school is exceptionally well led. The headteacher, his team and the governing body are all very clear about their commitment to your education, as are the other professionals who work in your school.

We suggest that your school's leaders should make sure that all departments evaluate, equally rigorously, how well all groups of students are working. We are suggesting this so they can be sure that absolutely everyone benefits fully from what your school offers.

Best wishes for your future,

Alan Alder

Her Majesty's Inspector