

Ripon Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121694
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	327550
Inspection dates	3–4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Josephine Nowacki HMI

The 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.

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Len Hird

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	820
Sixth form	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Marsden
Headteacher	Mr Martin Pearman
Date of previous school inspection	November 2005
School address	Clotherholme Road Ripon HG4 2DG
Telephone number	01765 602 647
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, two additional inspectors and a social care inspector who inspected the boarding provision. The inspectors visited lessons throughout the school, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the school's work, scrutinised the school's documentation and analysed 214 parental questionnaires. The social care inspector spoke to boarders, inspected the boarding houses and had meetings with managers.

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

- Are individuals and various groups of students in the school achieving as well as they should?
- How well do students in the sixth form make progress compared with their prior attainment at GCSE?
- Is the school's assessment of teaching and learning correct? Does teaching challenge all students, especially girls and the most able? Are students encouraged to become independent thinkers? Is the approach to lesson planning rigorous? How well are data used to inform teaching?
- How effectively do the leadership team tackle any underperformance? What evidence is there for this? How effective is self-evaluation, at all levels in the school?
- How well does the school promote equality and diversity?
- Are Every Child Matters outcomes excellent for all groups of students?

Information about the school

Ripon Grammar School is a selective school that recruits students aged 11 to 18 from a mainly rural area in North Yorkshire. There are low levels of unemployment and crime. Small areas of Ripon have significant areas of deprivation; approximately 20% of students come from these areas. Numbers on roll have increased steadily, although the school is smaller than most secondary schools. Students enter the school in Year 7 having achieved standards that are well above the national average. The proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is well below the national average, as is the proportion of students on free school meals. There 59 students in the boarding houses. The school has maintained specialist status in engineering since 2006.

The school has achieved recognition for its work through various awards including the Sportsmark, Artsmark, Inclusion Quality Mark and Healthy Schools. More recently the school has achieved the International School Award.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Inspectors judge that Ripon Grammar School is a good school with many outstanding features. The standards attained by students at the ends of both Key Stage 3 and 4 are high in relation to the national averages. From high attainment on entry to the school, students make good progress in many subjects, including mathematics and chemistry, and satisfactory progress in English language. The small numbers of students from minority heritage backgrounds and equally small numbers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to that of their peers. On the whole, boys make slightly better progress than girls. Attendance for all students, including those in the sixth form, is high.

The governors, headteacher and other senior managers provide a clear direction for improvement. Senior leaders have strengthened systems and this has led to improvements in several areas of the school. Views of students and parents and carers are sought regularly and taken seriously when determining priorities and areas for improvement. Data are used increasingly effectively at senior level to evaluate the work of the school in helping students to achieve. However, the systematic use of data by middle managers to analyse departmental performance is more variable. In the main, this results in some departmental action plans that do not address key issues, such as girls performing slightly less well than boys. Nevertheless, the school demonstrates good capacity to improve.

Teaching and learning are good overall and some outstanding, maintaining the quality seen in the last inspection. However, some teaching is satisfactory. In the main, this is because of a lack of rigour in planning learning for all abilities. Marking is satisfactory; teachers often give encouraging comments but too few provide students with helpful advice on how to improve their work.

Students' personal development is outstanding. They enjoy their time at school and say they feel safe and secure. They participate well in sport to keep fit and have been instrumental in ensuring that the canteen offers healthy food. The behaviour of the vast majority is exemplary both in and out of lessons. Students' contribution to the school community is good and many of them contribute to the local community, often through charity or voluntary work.

Students have good personal and social skills and they show respect for one another and their teachers. The school is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. Policies are in place and there is recognition by the local authority of the

school's work. However, there is still too little impact of this work on the knowledge, understanding and attitudes that students have of cultures other than their own. Equally, the school's strategy to promote community cohesion is underdeveloped; there are no clear arrangements to monitor or evaluate the school's work in this area.

What does the school need to do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching and improve students' learning and their rates of progress by:
 - improving the rigour of lesson planning to ensure that outcomes are measurable and based on what students should learn
 - using assessment data to plan learning strategies that will meet the needs and abilities of all students
 - ensuring that students' work is marked thoroughly and consistently, giving them helpful advice on how to improve their work and reach the next level.
- Promote students' understanding of other cultures through
 - mapping existing good practice and extending this work across the school
 - monitoring and evaluating activities which promote equality and diversity and community cohesion.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students attain high test results at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4. In lessons, students are very keen to do well. They show high levels of application. Students enjoy challenge, rise to it and make intellectual demands of themselves. When given the opportunity to do so, students exercise independent thought: most do so very well. However, not all lessons provide the opportunity for students to make good or better progress. In these instances, the teacher talks too much, students are passive and, consequently, the pace of learning slows. In a number of lessons, inspectors observed a few students, often boys, being allowed to dominate discussion and, on these occasions, girls' learning was not as effective as it should have been. Overall, data indicate that students, including the very small number of students from minority ethnic heritages and the equally small numbers of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress during their time at school, building well on their high standards on entry. However, boys generally make slightly better progress than girls. Students achieve extremely well in several subjects, including in mathematics and chemistry, but less well in English language where progress is satisfactory.

The overwhelming majority of students enjoy coming to school and this is exemplified by their high levels of attendance. Students feel extremely safe and secure in school. They say that they know who to turn to for help and the very rare incidences of bullying are dealt with rapidly.

Behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around school. Students respond readily to instructions and settle conscientiously to their work. The vast majority of parents think that behaviour is very good.

Students are extremely aware of the need to eat healthily and were the driving force behind recent improvements to the lunch menu. They relish the many opportunities that the school offers them to take exercise and to play team and individual sports.

Within the school students accept responsibility well. Many of them take an active role in raising money for various charities. Sixth formers act as good role models for younger learners and take the lead in running the school council. Work in the wider community is good, for example, participation in music competitions and voluntary work undertaken by the older students.

Students' skills in literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT), and in independent and group research work are very well-developed. Allied to very high attainment and high aspirations, these skills mean students are very well-prepared for further stages in their education and future careers.

Students' moral and social skills are good; they care well for one another and for others less fortunate than themselves. Their spiritual development is satisfactory. Although students have a strong understanding of their own culture and some have opportunities to develop their understanding of other cultures through the school's Comenius links, students generally have a limited understanding of the multi-ethnic make-up of modern Britain.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance ¹	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?	2

How effective is the provision?

Some practice is outstanding, but teaching is judged to be good overall, because there is a variation in the quality in some subjects. The school is seeking to rectify this. Good relationships between students and their teachers help to ensure that the large majority adopt positive attitudes and enjoy their learning. In the most effective lessons, students are enthused and motivated because teachers have high expectations and provide a variety of activities well matched to their needs and

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

interests. Tasks require students' active involvement which gives them good opportunities to develop independence to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to help build students' understanding and ensure they make good progress. However, there remain pockets of satisfactory rather than good teaching in some areas. In the less effective lessons, lesson planning does not take full account of students' range of ability and data about students' prior attainment are not used routinely to inform learning strategies. Objectives for the lesson are often imprecise and there is a tendency to concentrate on what students will do rather than on what they are expected to learn. Students are not given the opportunity to be actively involved in lessons and so their learning is too passive and, occasionally, a minority are allowed to dominate discussion.

The quality of marking is satisfactory. There is some good practice in the sixth form and in some cases in the main school, but it is not sufficiently widespread. Most teachers offer words of encouragement and praise. However, there are too few comments on marked work that indicate to students how they can improve and reach their targets.

Most students and their parents feel that the curriculum meets their needs; inspectors agree with this view. Progress in developing the school's ICT curriculum has been good since the last inspection. This subject is now integrated well in most subjects. Some vocational courses are being introduced to enhance the curriculum further. The high quality work provided by the library enhances the curriculum yet further by developing independent learning skills through integrated curriculum projects. Excellent links with the business and industrial communities and with other schools in the locality strengthen the curriculum and extend the opportunities available to students, including those in the sixth form. As befits a school with engineering specialist status, many good links relate to this status such as the bridge building project: this is particularly effective in developing students' enterprise skills.

Enrichment is provided through an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, which contribute significantly to students' academic achievement, personal development and enjoyment. Sports opportunities are particularly strong. A high proportion of students, including sixth formers, are engaged in supporting physical education in local primary schools.

Excellent care, guidance and support ensure that students achieve very well. The school's strong links with outside agencies support the varied needs of the few students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are vulnerable. Highly effective procedures are in place to ensure that students from local, national and international backgrounds are well-prepared to start school and settle quickly. Parents and carers are well-informed about the progress of their children and any problems are rapidly dealt with. Arrangements to support students as they move between key stages are well-established and help them to make informed choices about their educational and career opportunities.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a clear recognition of the potential for the school to improve and the school's governors and senior leaders demonstrate an unequivocal desire to ensure that this happens. This is communicated explicitly to others, creating a climate within which staff strive successfully to help students achieve well. Management systems have been sharpened to improve procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and the accountability of leaders at different levels, but this has not led to consistent practice by middle leaders. The school has rectified a number of issues from the previous inspection, including improving the provision for ICT. Some, however, are still priorities for further development. The use of assessment data to inform teaching and learning has improved, but good practice is not widespread. The school's work with partnerships and others to strengthen the curriculum and ensure the well-being of learners is excellent.

Systems for tracking and monitoring students' progress and the use of data to analyse performance and set targets for school improvement have improved and are now well-established at senior level, albeit relatively recently. The resulting information has been analysed and used at senior level to identify where action can be taken to improve the achievement of individual students. However, the use of data to analyse performance and inform strategies and actions for improvement is not sufficiently rigorous at departmental level, resulting in variations in the quality of teaching and students' achievement.

Governors are committed, knowledgeable and have a wide range of skills. They generally provide a good level of challenge to the school and take action to ensure the school improves. However, they do not use the full range of available evidence to analyse academic performance which on occasions lessens the effectiveness of the challenge they can provide to senior managers.

Safeguarding procedures are good. Appropriate checks are carried out on all staff and visitors to the school. Staff and governors receive training to update them on procedures. Students say they feel safe and secure. Parents and carers consider the school's safety arrangements to be a strength and appreciate the safe and welcoming environment in which their children can learn and enjoy their education. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The school demonstrates its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion through statutory policies and recognition from the local authority. However, students, including sixth formers, show little understanding of diversity and the differences between cultures. The school's work on community cohesion is satisfactory overall. Students make good contributions to the school community through the school council and to the wider

community through voluntary work. However, the school does not have a clear strategy in place nor does it monitor or evaluate fully the impact of its work. Financial resources are managed well. Resources are deployed very effectively to achieve outstanding outcomes for students.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Pass rates are high, as is the proportion of grades of 'A' or 'B' gained. However, standards vary across subjects. The progress made by the vast majority of students is satisfactory given their starting points at GCSE. It is consistently good in chemistry and in fine art. Relationships between staff and students are very good. Most students' attitudes to study are exemplary. Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students act responsibly and many are involved in a range of voluntary activities, both within the school and in the local community. Sixth form students who are prefects take their role seriously, providing excellent role models for younger students. Teaching in the sixth form is good overall; however, there is much that remains satisfactory, which results in many students making average progress. Actions are in place to rectify this. The sixth form curriculum is good and meets the needs of most students well. Fruitful, partnership working with the nearby comprehensive school enhances the range of GCE AS and A levels on offer. Students value highly the support they receive from their teachers and say that many of them go the 'extra mile' to help them. Systems, developed by the head of sixth form, for tracking students' academic progress are rigorous and effective in identifying those students who are not doing as well as they should. As a result, effective intervention strategies are put in place for those students who are in need of extra support to keep on track. Care, guidance and support are generally good. Advice and guidance for university applications is thorough. However, the advice and guidance offered to students who choose other destinations is less helpful, although actions are in place to rectify this. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Since the last inspection the head of sixth form has secured many improvements, including an expanding curriculum and a significant improvement in facilities planned for September 2009.

These are the grades for sixth form

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

Boarding provision

The quality of boarding at Ripon Grammar School is good. The management structure and strong sense of community within the school contribute effectively to the protection and promotion of boarding pupils' welfare. The school has made some improvements since the last inspection, which relate to the quality of food and methods of communicating with boarding pupils.

There is good provision at the school for promoting the health and well-being of boarding pupils. They are encouraged to be healthy and to have active lives while living there. Personal, health, citizenship and social education lessons provide age-appropriate advice concerning matters such as health, sex education and relationships.

There are good working relationships with the local health services and boarding pupils are registered with the local surgery and dentist. Clear procedures are followed for the management and administration of medication and appropriate records are maintained, although members of staff have not received any formal training in this process. Medication is stored securely; however, it is not stored in cabinets designed for this purpose. When boarding pupils are unwell they are well looked-after by members of the boarding house staff and parents are kept fully informed of the progress of their child's health.

Boarding pupils have a good, healthy, balanced and nutritious diet which promotes their health and physical well-being. The school has achieved the 'healthy schools' award in recognition of the steps it has taken to develop healthy lifestyles. Menus are well-planned in conjunction with the boarding pupils, with a number of choices available including a vegetarian option. Boarding pupils commented, 'These are the best meals at the school we have ever had' and 'We always get a good choice of food and there is always plenty of healthy food to eat'.

Boarders feel safe at the school and are fully supportive of one another. There is an effective anti-bullying policy and leaflets for parents and boarding pupils explain how any concerns or complaints will be resolved. There is a designated person with overall responsibility for safeguarding matters who provides guidance to all staff.

Comprehensive systems are in place to record, monitor and prevent risks to health and safety at the school. Fire and safety equipment is regularly checked. Regular fire drills are held at different times of the day and night and boarding pupils know the procedures they have to follow.

Members of staff receive appropriate safeguarding training and are aware of the relevant policies and reporting procedures. All staff working at the school have been

recruited in full accordance with the relevant regulations and this confidential information is maintained securely.

The boarding house staff team work closely with parents and other staff to ensure that boarding pupils are given all of the help and support they need. Boarding pupils said they all get on well together and that they are treated fairly and equally.

Boarding pupils are actively encouraged to take part in the day-to-day running of the boarding house and can influence decisions made within the school. The staff have an open-door policy for boarders to speak to them about any subject, though some boarders said they felt that it was easier to speak to some members of staff than others.

There are telephones in the houses for boarders to keep in contact with their family and friends. Boarders also use their personal mobile phones or their own email addresses. Great care and attention is given to the support of boarding pupils, particularly those from overseas when they first arrive. All of the house staff ensure that there is a friendly welcome and a careful eye is kept upon new boarders, so that 'homesickness' does not become a problem.

The accommodation provided is clean and satisfactorily maintained, though there are some areas in the boarding houses requiring remedial work. The dormitories are satisfactorily decorated and personalised by the boarding pupils. There are appropriate levels of security, privacy, toileting and bathing in the boarding houses.

The school provides an easy-to-understand statement of its boarding principles and practices for parents, boarders and staff. The organisation and management of the boarding houses creates a safe, non discriminatory and supportive atmosphere for boarders. Although it is judged to be satisfactory in the school, equality and diversity within the boarding provision is good. Clear policies and procedures are in place. Staff show good awareness of the backgrounds of boarding students and ensure that their cultural needs are met effectively. All of the boarding pupils are encouraged to be supportive of each other; many of them commented on this fact and that generally they are treated with understanding, respect and dignity by staff.

There are good recording systems and up-to-date risk assessments in place to ensure the health and safety of boarders.

Staffing levels, both during the day and at night, are commensurate with the current needs and numbers of boarders residing at the school.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

- Ensure opportunities are provided for training and updating boarding house staff in the safe handling and administration of medication (NMS 34).
- Ensure that all prescribed medication is stored in an appropriate and secure medicine cabinet (NMS 15).

- Ensure that all ongoing repairs and decorations in the boarding houses be completed (NMS 40).

These are the grades for boarding provision

How effective is the boarding provision in meeting the needs of boarders?	2
What is the quality of the boarding experience and what impact does it have on boarders' development?	2
How effectively is the boarding provision led and managed?	2

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school and its work and feel that any issues will be dealt with swiftly and professionally. They appreciate the care provided for their children and like the emphasis the school places on personal development. A small minority of parents and carers think there are some minor behavioural issues, but on the whole consider that their child is in a safe and welcoming environment. Most parents and carers consider the school takes their views seriously, acting upon them as appropriate.

Ofsted invited all the parents and carers of pupils registered at Ripon Grammar School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspection team received 214 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 684 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall I am happy with my child's experience at this school	178	35	1	0

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

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:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
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.

5 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Ripon Grammar School, Ripon, HG4 2DG

As you know a group of inspectors visited your school recently and I am writing to tell you about the main findings.

You told us about the many things you enjoyed and what you think is good about the school. For example, you said that you are very proud to be a part of the school's community and that you felt well looked-after, safe and secure. You show respect for one another. However, inspectors found that the school does not develop your knowledge and understanding of cultures beyond those found at school sufficiently well. Your attendance is exemplary. This, and your willingness to learn, helps you to do very well in examinations at the end of Year 9, in GCSEs and in GCE A levels. Most of you make good progress, given your starting points when you come into school. However, we found that in a few subjects, you could make more progress than you do now. We also found, and the school already knows this, that boys make slightly better progress than girls.

The inspectors found that you make good progress when teachers plan lessons that help you to get involved and think for yourselves. Inspectors judge teaching as good overall, but found that some lessons are satisfactory. This is mostly because the teacher did too much talking and did not involve you or check whether you had understood things. We found you are provided with excellent care, support and advice to help you move on to the next stage of your education.

We think the governors, the headteacher and his senior team set a very clear direction for the school to improve. They have made some good improvements since the school was inspected last time in 2005. However, we still think there are some things that could be improved further. In particular we have asked the school to:

- increase the amount of teaching that is good or outstanding
- ensure that they help you to understand fully other cultures and life in multicultural Britain.

We very much enjoyed visiting your school and wish you all the very best for the future.

Josephine Nowacki HMI
On behalf of the inspection team

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