

# Rydens School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	125262
<b>Local Authority</b>	Surrey
<b>Inspection number</b>	328327
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Nigel Fletcher 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>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1116
Sixth form	186
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Margaret Hicks
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Mark Jackman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	16 November 2005
<b>School address</b>	Hersham Road Walton-on-Thames KT12 5PY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01932 242 994
<b>Fax number</b>	01932 252 896

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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

Rydens School is a large comprehensive school in Walton-on-Thames. The majority of its students are from the local area, and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is slightly above average. Fewer than 15% of the students come from minority ethnic groups, mainly from Asian heritage, and a small number speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs, particularly those with moderate learning difficulties and behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, is above average, although the number with a statement is low. The school has had specialist status as a business and enterprise college since 2004. It gained Investors in People status in 2000, which it has retained, while also achieving other national awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Rydens School is a good and improving school where students achieve well and develop good personal skills. It provides an outstanding curriculum that responds well to the needs of each and every student. Parents comment that their children 'enjoy school and flourish academically' and 'are encouraged to reach their full potential'.

Students join the school with standards that are below average. They make good progress in their learning at Key Stages 3 and 4; in English, progress is outstanding. School data for the current year show that students' progress continues to improve and that they are on track to reach standards that are above those found nationally. Students enjoy good relationships with their teachers. As one parent said, 'The teachers always seem to go the extra mile.' The quality of teaching is good overall, with some examples of outstanding practice, as is the support provided to those with moderate learning difficulties or behavioural problems.

The senior leadership team provides good leadership to a committed staff. The headteacher has led the way forward to create an inclusive school where all students are supported to do well. There is a strong ethos of continual improvement in both academic and personal achievement which pervades the whole school. A sense of common purpose is shared by staff and students alike. School leaders are fully aware of how well the school is doing. The school effectively carries out regular and accurate self-evaluations of its performance. These have identified the key areas for improvement and have led to well-targeted actions, for example to raise standards in a few underperforming subjects such as science and history. However, school leaders do not work sufficiently with governors to evaluate the impact on students' performance of school policies regarding equalities. School leaders have the full support of staff, parents and a strong governing body. Parents appreciate the 'parents' council', although some would like better communication with the school.

Students value the high level of care and support they receive from all staff. Students who may be at risk of becoming disaffected are monitored closely and well supported. Behaviour is good around the school. Bullying is rare; students report that, when it does happen, it is dealt with quickly, effectively and sympathetically. Attendance is broadly average, and improving.

There is a very strong sense of community, promoted through carefully fostered relationships within the house system and the student council. Students are encouraged to speak out on how the school might improve. They regularly take part in evaluating lessons, producing high-quality reports on strengths and areas for improvement. Many students act as peer mentors to assist children lower down the school. The school also plays a significant part in the wider community, for example, through very successful charity events.

The curriculum is exemplary. Through effective planning and timetabling the school provides excellent opportunities for students to study a wide range of academic and vocational subjects appropriate to their individual needs, and to participate in the many additional sporting, cultural and personal development activities. In particular, music and drama are significant features in the school. Many students and parents commented enthusiastically about the recent school production of 'Guys and Dolls'. The school's business and enterprise specialism has a good impact on improving learning across the school. Students value the added dimension that this brings to the different areas of the curriculum, and how it pervades the culture of the school. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and has a strong capacity

to continue to improve. Many parents supported the observation of one who said, 'Rydens was a good choice. I would recommend others to send their children here.'

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Students' progress is satisfactory overall, with generally better outcomes at A level than AS. Achievement in 2008 varied between subjects. The school has taken action to deal with this and expects improved results in 2009. As yet, the full impact of these improvements is not evident. Examination results are in line with national averages. The transition to the sixth form is well managed and the school shows genuine commitment to meeting students' choices. Students receive good academic and personal support and guidance from staff, as well as high levels of individual attention. Attendance is good and the proportion of students completing their courses is high.

The new head of sixth form has a clear vision for how the sixth form will develop further and has implemented a number of initiatives and new procedures; these are already beginning to have a positive effect. Students speak favourably about the improvements over the past year, including in the quality of teaching. They enjoy their studies and gain in maturity as they develop skills that will stand them in good stead in later life. Teachers and tutors know their students well and monitor their progress and personal well-being carefully. Guidance about employment or further study is good. A good range of A- and AS-level courses is offered alongside a limited number of more work-related and lower-level options. There are plans to extend this range. Sixth formers make a positive contribution to the school and to the wider community, for example in helping younger students in their house, and fundraising for charity.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards in science and history at Key Stage 4.
- Raise achievement in the sixth form so that it is at least good across all subjects and levels.
- Improve the consistency with which governors and leaders at all levels evaluate the impact of school policies.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

The attainment of students when they enter the school in Year 7 is below average. In Years 7 to 9, they make good progress, representing a continued improvement in performance since the last inspection; standards are now around average. Achievement in English ranks very highly. Although achievement in science was low in recent years, school data for current students show much improvement.

In Years 10 and 11, students' achievement is good compared with their level of attainment at the previous key stage. They make exceptionally good progress in English and mathematics. This has contributed well to the significant improvement in the proportion of students who gained five or more high grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. This is now above average. In 2008, attainment of GCSE passes overall was satisfactory, but there was significant variation in performance between subjects. For example, a lower proportion of students attained high grades in science, history, and design and technology, than they did in other subjects, such as English, business studies, and art and design. However, the school is fully aware of

what is needed to raise standards. School data show that standards overall have improved in the current year and are now above average.

The school analyses the performance of specific groups of students and takes appropriate action to address any differences, for example by providing after school revision clubs. As a result, there is little variation between the achievements of different groups.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Students are very enthusiastic about their school; as one said, 'The school lets you be yourself and excel at what you enjoy.' The majority of students are well behaved, and any instances of poor behaviour are managed well by staff. The number of exclusions has fallen considerably. Older students comment positively on how the school has changed, with an emphasis on good behaviour, and particularly on raising their academic achievement. Around the school, students are confident, articulate, courteous, and friendly to others.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. There are many opportunities for students to consider ideas, actions and their consequences. The school raises substantial sums for charity, for example, through the Youth and Philanthropy Project. There is a very strong sense of community, promoted through carefully fostered relationships within the house system and the student council. The school's business and enterprise culture makes a good contribution to students' confidence and social skills. Older students are very supportive of younger ones in a wide variety of ways. Students feel safe in school and have a good understanding of the need to lead a healthy lifestyle. The school prepares students well for later life, especially in skills for enterprise, and information and communication technology (ICT).

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

As a result of good teaching, most students make good progress in their lessons. In the better lessons, teachers are skilled at engaging and motivating students who, as a result, behave well and are confident and enthusiastic learners. Lessons are well structured and proceed at a fast pace, providing challenge to all students. However, a few lessons are uninspiring and fail to engage students fully in learning, leading to low-level disruption.

Learning objectives are clear and students understand the purpose of their work. Good use is made of interactive whiteboards, by both teachers and students, and the influence of the school's enterprise specialism permeates lessons. Skilful use of questioning enables teachers to extend students' understanding while assessing their progress. Good relationships significantly enhance learning as they are based on mutual trust; students have the confidence to make mistakes and to learn from them. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and are skilled in assessing their own work. Students' progress is regularly assessed and tracked during the year. Marking provides good feedback on how students can improve their work. There is an effective programme of professional development for teachers, and appropriate opportunities for them to share good practice.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

There is an excellent curriculum built around individual needs. After restructuring the curriculum for Key Stage 3, the school introduced skills-based 'flexibility days' and the 'learning to learn' programme. There are clear and improved progression routes from Year 7 to Year 11. In Key Stage 4, students have a wide range of GCSE and vocational options. All students take short GCSE courses in religious education and citizenship at the end of Year 10, and some take mathematics GCSE in Year 10 followed by statistics in Year 11. Vocational options include construction at the local college, a certificate in 'Skills for Working Life', and an excellent Applied Learning Project.

A programme of personal and social development deals effectively with issues such as healthy lifestyles and personal safety, and is supplemented through the 'flexibility days'. The effects of the business and enterprise specialism are very evident throughout the school, for example through the 'Rydens Apprentice' and 'Dragons' activity days. Many business partners are also active in the school, helping to raise students' expectations. Students' literacy and numeracy are well developed and all students take an examination course in ICT. The school provides a broad range of extra-curricular activities, including many sporting activities, music and drama productions, and trips overseas, for example to Iceland, all of which contribute to the students' personal development and enjoyment of school.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Many parents comment on how the school nurtures a 'safe and caring environment', 'in which children flourish and gain confidence'. Procedures for ensuring students' safety are robust and statutory checks are in place. Students appreciate the way that all staff are approachable and helpful. Many parents agree that when concerns arose, the school dealt with them promptly and sympathetically. Welfare support is excellent for students who need help with personal issues and for those who are at risk of exclusion. Academic support for vulnerable students and students with special educational needs, such as those with moderate learning difficulties, is exemplary. Consequently, the progress they make is similar to that of their peers.

Parents speak highly of the induction programme, which allows an 'extremely smooth transfer from primary school' for their children. Students receive sound advice as they move through each stage of their education. Systems for tracking students' progress, and guiding them on how they can improve, are good. Students are set challenging targets and extra programmes are provided for not only those who are underperforming, but also for the gifted and talented.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher has developed a very clear vision for the school, which has responsibility and enterprise at its heart. As a result, he and his senior colleagues have been successful in promoting initiative, resourcefulness and learning. Staff and students know that they can be inventive and work on new ideas, but that they are always accountable for what they do. The school sets challenging targets and uses them successfully, along with other strategies, to raise standards. Through a variety of methods, and listening to the views of parents, students and local

businesses, senior staff have a very accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The involvement of students in some of these activities has been instrumental in improving teaching and results.

The school has a good understanding of its own community. Through the school's strong links with other institutions, and the carefully designed curriculum, students appreciate the richness and value of diversity and of learning from other people. There is an inclusive and harmonious atmosphere within the school. The contribution to community cohesion is good. Governors are well informed. They provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders in helping the school to improve. They maintain firm control of most aspects of the school's work, including finance, but are not as vigilant as they should be in working with school leaders to monitor the impact of school policies on equalities.



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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?	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

<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>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	2
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

## The quality of provision

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

## 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	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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**

01 April 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Rydens School, Walton-on-Thames, KT12 5PY

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff, and visiting lessons. Many of you told us how the caring and supportive environment, and your good relationships with teachers, mean that you enjoy school and feel safe there. We judged your school to be a very caring school that is providing you with a good education. We were particularly impressed by:

- your attitude to learning and the way in which your confidence and self-esteem develop as you move through the school
- the courses and other activities that the school provides to ensure that you have the best opportunities to make good progress in your academic and personal development
- the way the school cares for and supports you in your learning, and when you have other problems or concerns
- the way the school is led by senior staff, and the commitment of its staff to your education and well-being.

To make your school even better we have recommended that it:

- helps you do better in science and history in your GCSE examinations
- raises achievement in the sixth form so that it is at least good across all subjects, and at both AS and A level
- improves the consistency with which school leaders and governors evaluate the impact that school policies are having on improving performance.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have plans to do it. We believe that if you behave well and work hard in lessons, and help the school put these plans in place, then standards will rise further. On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours faithfully

Nigel Fletcher

Her Majesty's Inspector