

Mellow Lane School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102447
Local Authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	331561
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1022
Sixth form	174
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Scammell
Headteacher	Mrs Marion Lewis
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2008
School address	Hewens Road Hayes UB4 8JP
Telephone number	020 8573 1039
Fax number	020 8813 7058

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Mellow Lane is an average sized secondary school serving an ethnically diverse community. Many students stay on into the sixth form. Most students live locally, which includes areas of economic and social disadvantage. The largest group of students is from a White British background, and those from Asian heritages form the second largest. Around a quarter are entitled to free school meals. An above average and increasing proportion of students speak English as an additional language. More than twice the national average have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, most significantly moderate learning difficulties and communication difficulties. The school has specialist units for students with autistic spectrum disorder and for those with speech, language or communication difficulties. It has specialist status in Humanities and has achieved the 'Healthy Hillingdon' and the Artsmark Gold awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Mellow Lane is an improving school and provides a satisfactory education. The headteacher and staff at all levels have worked diligently to build on the improvements identified in the previous inspection, so as to successfully raise standards and achievement. With support from the local authority and external consultants, they have focused on improving attendance, raising the quality of teaching, careful monitoring of student progress, and well-targeted interventions. Consequently, the majority of students now make satisfactory progress from their well below average starting points. Current school data and inspection findings, based on the most recent assessment information, indicate that the school will sustain the improvements in 2009, and that an increased proportion are on track to achieve 5 A* to C GCSE grades when mathematics and English are included.

Robust and regular monitoring, whole-school training and targeted support are leading to improvements in teaching and learning. Although its quality remains satisfactory overall, an increasingly high proportion of lessons are good or better because teachers provide more opportunities for active learning in well-paced lessons. However, inconsistencies continue, due in some part to recruitment difficulties. The quality of marking is variable, as some teachers do not always give students sufficiently constructive advice on how to move their learning forward.

The personal development and well-being of students is satisfactory. Students say that they enjoy school, and are generally positive about improvements, including redecoration and remedial work in some areas of the school, and the introduction of blazers. The school has worked hard to significantly reduce the number of students who are persistently absent. Overall attendance has risen, so it is now consistently around the national average; however, it remains a priority for further improvement. Opportunities for students to make a real contribution to school life and the wider community are limited.

The staff provide satisfactory care, guidance and support. Students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those at an early stage in learning English, feel well supported. Academic guidance is satisfactory, although students are not always sufficiently guided or challenged to move to the next level. Close monitoring of student progress, the identification of underperforming students, and subsequent interventions have contributed well to raising achievement. The school is extending the systems for monitoring students' progress into Key Stage 3, where the improvement in achievement has been slower.

The curriculum, overall, is satisfactory. The taught curriculum model, particularly at Key Stage 4, meets the needs of students well and provides a good range of vocational and academic courses at different levels. However, there are insufficient events and activities to meet the diverse interests and abilities of all students.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, well supported by the senior leaders, provides clear direction. Although middle leaders are increasingly contributing to school improvement, their impact is variable. Consequently, capacity to improve remains satisfactory when recruitment difficulties are also taken into account. The school has a good understanding of its role in promoting community cohesion, and has planned its approach to all aspects of its development, much of which is based around its Humanities specialist status. Evaluation of the

impact of individual activities routinely takes place, although its overall impact is less well developed.

Few parents responded to the inspection parental questionnaire. Many were supportive; however, over half raised a number of concerns including how well the school takes account of their views. Inspection evidence suggested that this is possibly linked to the school's actions in relation to improvements such as attendance or the absence of a website. However, a new school website is almost complete.

The school's specialist status in humanities has broadened provision and contributed to students' personal development, particularly through citizenship. Students in the specialist resource provision units are taught mainly in mainstream lessons. They receive good care and support, and make similar progress to their peers.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards in the sixth form have improved and are now in line with or close to national averages in the majority of courses. Most students make satisfactory progress from their lower than average starting points, and many make good progress. Data for current students indicate that most are on track to achieve or exceed their challenging targets. Teaching and learning have improved; while satisfactory overall, the proportion of good lessons is steadily increasing. The curriculum has a good balance of vocational and academic courses. However, due to small numbers, some Year 12 and 13 courses are taught together, and this slows the progress of some students.

Students' overall personal development and well-being is good, although their contribution to school life is satisfactory. They have mature attitudes to their learning. Students have good relationships with each other and staff. They have a mature approach to the needs of others. For example, they have worked together to raise money to sponsor a trip to South Africa by nine students with sufficient funds to build a house in an area of poverty.

Attendance is good, and students comment positively about all aspects of provision, particularly the support they receive from teachers. This reflects their good enjoyment of their time in the sixth form. They receive good care, guidance and support. Students are guided well for life beyond school, with an increasing proportion successfully applying to university.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. More rigorous systems now monitor the overall quality of provision and student achievement. There is a clear vision and commitment to continuous improvement, although decisions for further improvement are not always based on the overall review of actions.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sustain recent improvements in teaching and learning so that lessons are consistently good, to raise standards and the achievement of all students.
- Extend the opportunities for students to participate in out-of-lesson activities, take on posts of responsibility, and make a greater contribution to the life of the school.
- Improve the progress made by students, by building on recent improvements in attendance.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Test results show that standards at Key Stage 3 in 2008 were exceptionally low. Robust school data indicate that the majority of students are now making satisfactory progress and are on track to meet their targets in the core subjects by the end of Year 9. Consequently, standards have moved closer to the national average, although they still remain below average. The percentage of students obtaining five or more good passes at GCSE significantly improved in the 2008 examinations. Results when English and mathematics are included also showed some improvement. Attainment on entry for students in the current Year 11 is below that of previous years. However, current school and inspection data indicate that the majority of students are on track to make at least the expected rate of progress from their lower starting points, and that the school is successfully addressing the legacy of underachievement. Overall standards are moving closer to the national average. The school has a significant proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities: they also make satisfactory progress overall, including those in the specialist provision units. Similarly, the progress of different ethnic groups and that of the significant number of students whose first language is not English is also satisfactory. The school's use of challenging targets, close progress monitoring and high expectations for departmental actions is having a positive effect on raising achievement. However, variation in subject performance remains and, as a result, a small minority of students still underachieve. Not all specialist targets were met in 2008, although there is good evidence to suggest that the school will move closer to meeting these this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students are committed to their learning and enjoy school. They feel safe in the school because of sound relationships between students, and they know that any incidents which may occur are effectively dealt with. Students feel well supported on entry to the school, in part due to peer mentoring. As a result of the school's concerted efforts, attendance has risen overall; however, it remains below the school's challenging target. Healthy lifestyles are promoted through good catering options, physical education lessons and extra-curricular sporting activities. Opportunities for students' satisfactory spiritual development occur primarily in lessons. Their moral and cultural development is satisfactory. Behaviour in the classroom is often good, though students report that there is still some minor disruption, and they can lack enthusiasm when the lessons are not stimulating. Poor behaviour is still an area of concern to some parents, but students and staff say that as a result of stringent efforts, this situation has greatly improved. The reduction of fixed term exclusions also supports this view. Students are increasingly well prepared for the future, in particular through an increased focus on English and mathematics, and a well-established course at Key Stage 4 that develops workplace and life skills. Students are involved in fund-raising for charities, voluntary work and mentoring. However, opportunities to take on roles of responsibility and to be fully involved in the life of the school and wider communities are limited. The school senate gives an opportunity for students' views to be noted.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In most lessons, teachers have good relationships with students and use their good subject knowledge to plan the lessons well, setting clear objectives for learning and using questioning effectively to stimulate learning. Their use of a variety of teaching styles and activities, which increasingly includes information and communication technology, enables most students to make satisfactory or better progress. However, in some lessons learning is not clearly defined or sufficiently imaginative, and the expectations are too low to enable students to develop their self-confidence and a desire to do better. This can lead to passivity and slower progress. Some students experience a succession of temporary teachers, and students say - and inspectors agree - that this has impacted on both their enjoyment and their progress. As part of the specialist status contribution to raising standards, the English department has developed a good standard for classrooms, and this has significantly improved learning environments across the school. Good use is made of support staff both in and out of lessons to ensure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those learning English as a second language, are well supported. Regular assessment and tracking of students' progress is now a well-established routine in the school, although the information available about individual students' progress is used inconsistently within lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is broad and balanced at both Key Stage 3 and 4. It is regularly reviewed and refined to meet the changing needs of students. At Key Stage 4, a wide range of academic and skills-based courses provide good progression for students' future learning or employment. Some vocational courses are available through partnership with neighbouring schools, with Mellow Lane running successful construction courses. Home languages courses have recently been introduced. Citizenship, a specialist subject, is taught in all years, with qualifications achieved by the end of Key Stage 4. In addition, a small number of special days and the specialist status 'Humanities Weeks' broaden students' experiences and contribute well to their personal development. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Additional lessons enable students in the early stages of learning English, those in Years 7 and 8 who need help with basic skills, and those in the specialist resource provision to access the main curriculum. Many trips and visits are offered. A reasonable range of clubs and other out-of-lesson activities are provided, including choir and tae kwon do. However, student participation is low because they do not sufficiently meet their diverse interests and abilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Pastoral aspects of care and support are good. The support for vulnerable students, including those with physical or learning disabilities or difficulties, is good, being both sensitive and effective. The school has satisfactory systems for ensuring a smooth transition from the various primary schools. Child protection procedures are secure, and health and safety issues fully addressed. At the various stages of their education, students receive good advice and guidance relating to option choices and future careers. This ensures that students are guided onto courses appropriate to their abilities and interests. The school has made strenuous efforts since the

last inspection to encourage students to attend regularly, and have established an 'Every Day Counts' ethos in relation to students' achievement. Increasingly sophisticated use of data through the new tracking systems is making a positive impact on student progress, particularly at Key Stage 4. New rewards systems also recognise and promote achievement. Students and parents are well informed in relation to levels of progress and targets. However, in some cases, teachers' marking does not fully inform students of what they need to do to improve their achievement. Displays in many corridors promote personal development by providing sound advice or celebrating school life.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is leading from the front in the drive to raise the achievement of all students. She has developed a cohesive senior team with clear roles and responsibilities. Staff at all levels share her vision, and work with determination and enthusiasm. Self-evaluation by senior leaders is accurate and reflects the efforts that the school has made to improve monitoring and evaluation, particularly in relation to student achievement and the quality of teaching. They are not complacent, and are aware that there is much work still to do. As a result of effective external support, middle leaders are more involved and accountable, and are increasingly leading improvements within their areas. However, the quality of their self-evaluation, action planning and impact on student achievement is variable. The school has experienced recruitment difficulties in the last year. Although it has endeavoured to ensure that this does not affect students' learning, this has not always been the case. Consequently, the capacity for further improvement remains satisfactory. Governors know the school well and use their expertise to provide support. Nevertheless, there is room for a more rigorous approach to reviewing policies, and in holding leaders to account. Partnerships with other organisations and schools are satisfactory, particularly in relation to the school's specialist status, supporting students' personal development, and enhancing curriculum opportunities.

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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?	3	3
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?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

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

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

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

27 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Mellow Lane School, Hayes, UB4 8JP

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to let you know that we enjoyed the time we spent with you on our recent visit. We would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for sharing your views with us in meetings, lessons and around the school. We agree with you that Mellow Lane has improved. Most of you are now making satisfactory progress, and while the standards you achieve by the end of Key Stage 4 remain below the national average, they have improved. This means that Mellow Lane School no longer requires a 'Notice to Improve'.

We hope that you will take the time to read the full report, but I have highlighted the key points below.

- Teaching has improved and more lessons are good, particularly when activities are varied and interesting. However, we agree with you that changes of teachers have reduced your enjoyment and the progress that you make in some lessons.
- Your progress is carefully tracked and you are being given good additional support to raise your achievement, particularly in Year 11 and in the sixth form.
- Your behaviour has improved, although a few of you still disrupt learning in some lessons.
- Your attendance at school has improved, although it still needs to be better.
- The timetabled curriculum meets your needs well. However, there are not enough clubs and activities to fully meet your various interests and abilities.
- Those of you in the sixth form enjoy school and attend well. You make at least satisfactory progress, and achieve standards in line with or close to the national average in the majority of subjects.

To improve things further, we have asked the school to:

- sustain recent improvements in teaching and learning, so that lessons are consistently good, and so raise your achievement
- extend the opportunities for you to participate in out-of-lesson activities, take on posts of responsibility, and make a greater contribution to the life of the school
- improve your progress by building on your recent improvements in attendance.

You can help by improving your attendance at school, participating more actively both in and out of lessons, and making a greater contribution to all aspects of school life.

Yours faithfully

Angela Corbett

Her Majesty's Inspector