

The Royal Docks Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131929
Local Authority	Newham
Inspection number	331564
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jennifer Brown 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1081
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Camley
Headteacher	Ms Ruth Martin (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	27 February 2008
School address	Prince Regent Lane Custom House London E16 3HS
Telephone number	020 7540 2700
Fax number	020 7540 2701

Age group	11–16
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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

This larger-than-average secondary school serves an area of London undergoing rapid change. Approximately 30% of students are eligible for free school meals, which is much higher than average. There are more students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than is typical nationally, the largest group having moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Additional funding is provided for 16 students with more profound learning difficulties whose needs are catered for in a special unit. Around two thirds of students are from minority groups, the largest representations being Black African, Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Eastern European; for just under a half of these students their first language is not English. A relatively large number of children who are in the care of a local authority attend the school.

The school has been awarded Sportsmark status and recently obtained the Healthy School award.

The school is currently being led by an acting headteacher, who took up post in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The school has been inspected three times in the last three years. It received a notice to improve on the two previous occasions it was inspected. During this time managers have brought about improvements in behaviour, the quality of teaching and the curriculum. They have had some success in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the 2008 inspection. However, despite the best efforts of the acting headteacher in the relatively short time she has been in post, collectively, leadership and management at the school are inadequate. This is because, until very recently, managers have had insufficient impact on raising standards and achievement at the school and the pace of improvement has been too slow.

The improvement in standards at the end of Year 11 which occurred in 2006 has not been sustained. Standards fell significantly in 2007. While there was a slight improvement in some results in 2008, most notably in the proportion of students achieving five or more higher-grade GCSEs, standards in many subject areas fell. Students made insufficient progress in relation to their starting points while they were at the school. Information provided by the school suggests that standards and achievement overall should improve in 2009. However, it is too early for the school to demonstrate whether these recent improvements will be secured and sustained when the level of support it is receiving from the local authority and outside consultants is removed.

Teaching and learning have been judged to be inadequate in the previous two inspections. The school has been successful in improving the quality of teaching, but some shortcomings still exist. The amount of good and better teaching remains inconsistent in different subjects. Also, more needs to be done to ensure this improvement in teaching results in students making better progress and becoming more competent learners. In too many lessons, teachers do not plan to use a range of activities which challenge, motivate and meet the needs of all students and enable them to make good progress. This is a weakness identified at the last two inspections. The quality of marking is too variable and students do not consistently receive advice about how to improve their work. Those who find learning more difficult are well supported by the learning support unit; however, the extent to which their needs are consistently met in lessons is too variable.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students feel safe at the school. The school is taking successful action to improve attendance which is now above the national average. Systems for checking lateness have also been improved, but there are still a significant number of latecomers. Although many students behave appropriately in lessons and around the school, the behaviour of some inhibits the learning of others in lessons. The school is involved in a number of initiatives to enable students' views to be heard within the school and the wider community. It is rightly proud that a Year 10 student has been elected as the Young Mayor of Newham. The care and support of students are satisfactory.

The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities for students to study a wide range of courses in Years 10 and 11. There has been a good improvement in how teachers help students

to improve their literacy skills, but support for numeracy skills is less well developed across the curriculum.

Monitoring, evaluation and accountability have recently improved. However, self-evaluation and improvement-planning throughout the school are not consistently informed by a rigorous analysis of all aspects of students' performance. For example, middle managers make a judgement about the quality of teaching and learning, but do not link it to judgements about the quality of students' achievement and provision within their area. Improvement plans do not consistently have clear criteria or time periods for evaluating the success of actions to address underachievement. The school now has a large budget deficit and is providing inadequate value for money. Governors have been insufficiently active in challenging managers to address weaknesses and bring about improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement by ensuring realistic but challenging targets are used effectively by all staff to secure rapid improvement.

Improve the quality of learning and students' progress by ensuring teachers consistently:

- use a range of activities which challenge and motivate, and meet the needs of all students
- provide students with clear information on how well they are achieving and what they need to do to improve.

- Improve the quality and impact of monitoring and evaluation and improvement-planning undertaken by managers and governors.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement and standards are inadequate. Students enter the school with standards that are below average. Standards fell significantly in 2007 and while there was the beginning of a recovery in some areas in 2008, only a quarter of students obtained 5 A*-C grades in GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics. Standards vary significantly between different subjects, being close to the national average in art and design and statistics, but well below average in others. Test results indicate that students between the ages of 11 and 16 made insufficient progress in relation to their capabilities in 2008, although progress in mathematics was very good.

Information provided by the school resulting from more robust monitoring of students' progress, particularly in Year 11, suggests that standards and achievement overall, and notably in English, should improve this year for this group of students. Inspectors found that students make good progress in some lessons. In a significant proportion of lessons, particularly in Years 7 to 9, students do not make sufficient progress in relation to their starting points to enable them to catch up on the legacy of underachievement of previous years. This is because teachers make insufficient use of assessment information to plan activities which adequately challenge students of all abilities and enable them to make good progress. The progress of students with learning difficulties was very variable in 2008. Whilst some made very good progress, the progress of students with less complex needs, or with a statement of special educational needs, was very low.

Standards and achievement at the end of Year 9 are well below average and very variable between subjects. They are higher in English and mathematics than science, where they are

exceptionally low. Information provided by the school suggests there was little improvement in 2008 from 2007, and targets have not been met for the last three years.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development and well-being of students are satisfactory. The school is seeking to promote healthy lifestyles and encourages students to adopt them. Its success is demonstrated by the award of Healthy School and Sportmark status. Students show confidence in explaining their knowledge and understanding of the community, other cultures and tolerance. They are responding positively to the school's initiatives to encourage consistent punctuality, attendance, good behaviour in lessons and self-motivation. Some, but not all, are succeeding and there are emergent patterns of improvement. The school has monitored the behaviour of some more vulnerable students and documented learning gains through describing 'Success Histories' as case studies. The provision of lessons about social and emotional literacy, anger management and restorative justice has assisted this transformation. The response of participants has been good overall, with wider effects across the whole school.

Students enjoy participating and learning through activities that support their spiritual, cultural, social and moral development, which is satisfactory. The curriculum provides a variety of opportunities for students to increase their understanding of the world of work. Over half the students in Year 10 are participating in work-related courses, some of which involve working off-site. However, too few are developing the literacy and numeracy skills they need to succeed in the next phase of their lives. A wide range of visits to local colleges is organised with learning mentor support, which is systematically given to ensure continuing routes into education and employment. School data on progression patterns are collected and inform new policies in a satisfactory way.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The school has worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning over the last two years. Strategies such as the coaching programme and the recently instituted subject reviews are beginning to have an effect, but the rate of improvement has been too slow. Inspectors found too few lessons that were consistently good or better. Considerable variation exists, across the curriculum and within subjects, in the quality of the learning opportunities experienced by students. Good practice does exist and most lessons are well structured. Where learning is most effective, lessons have a variety of activities, proceed at pace and are characterised by the teachers' high expectations. However, many lessons are dominated by too much teacher talk, so that students have few opportunities to discuss, research or to work independently. Too often students are insufficiently challenged, or find the work too difficult, because teachers are not using information about students' abilities to plan effectively work tailored to meet different needs. Consequently students lose interest, fail to get involved in the learning process and in some cases they misbehave. Many lessons are supported by a teaching assistant, but they are not always used to best effect. The quality of marking is good in some areas where teachers' feedback is informative and sets clear targets for improvements. This is not, however, consistent practice across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has good breadth and balance and meets statutory requirements. In Years 7 and 8, Spanish has been introduced as an additional foreign language, while in Year 9 more-able students are given the opportunity to take a GCSE examination early. The strength of the curriculum is in Years 10 and 11, where there is a rich mixture of GCSE and vocational courses at different levels, some of which are delivered through collaboration with external partners. These courses provide a good introduction into the world of work for participating students. Enterprise learning takes place mainly in Year 10 when local business mentors also come in to support students who are at risk of underachieving.

Students' information, communication and technology (ICT) skills are very well developed and they all follow an examination course in ICT in Years 10 and 11. The school has taken the lead in the borough for delivering the ICT diploma and a number of students follow the other diploma courses offered by local schools. Students receive good guidance to ensure that they opt for the most appropriate courses in Years 10 and 11 and a recent Careers Fair for these year groups was very well attended. Curriculum enrichment and extension activities include study support and revision, and educational visits to national museums and West End theatres.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support offered to students are satisfactory. Staff are confident in meeting a wide range of students' pastoral needs, so as to assist satisfactory and sometimes good progress from different individual starting points for some groups of students, for example, those at the early stages of learning English. The school works with a good range of external agencies to meet the needs of more vulnerable students. Personal welfare is supported through clubs, drop-in sessions and projects that are regularly evaluated for their impact. The school has integrated provision for students with profound and moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities and they are seen as part of the school community, especially when they meet in social areas and through their participation in some lessons. Academic guidance is now satisfactory and all students are provided with individual targets based on monitoring of their academic progress. Many, but not all, have a good understanding of what they need to do next in order to improve. The needs of gifted and talented students are not yet fully met because they are given insufficient opportunities to engage in more independent styles of learning. Most students receive good guidance on their options when they leave school, and some choose to do vocationally based courses that reflect these well-supported decisions. Health and safety matters are regularly reviewed. Students feel safe, and the 'Safe Schools' link with community policing supports this confidence. Good child protection and safeguarding procedures are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The capacity of leaders and managers to secure and sustain improvements is fragile. Some middle managers are new to their role and are still developing the necessary skills to drive improvements forward rapidly. Senior management capacity is being augmented through the

secondment of an acting headteacher to the school and the internal secondment of two assistant headteachers.

The acting headteacher has introduced more effective measures to hold leaders to account for their own and students' performance. The system of line management at senior and middle management level is now more focused on achievement and standards and on monitoring the effect of implementing strategies to address underachievement. The quality of self-evaluation throughout the school, however, is not sufficiently robust and accurate in analysing and acknowledging the significance of inadequacies in performance.

Monitoring and evaluation have been improved, but are not yet leading to sustained improvement in students' achievement. Recent refinements to systems for tracking students' progress and a greater focus by managers on the progress made by Year 11 students are beginning to have an effect. However, the implementation of these new systems throughout the whole school is not yet fully embedded and the rigour with which different departments analyse and use assessment information is variable. Managers regularly evaluate teaching and learning, but until recently have focused too much on the quality of teaching rather than students' learning and progress.

Senior and middle leaders have made appropriate steps to develop a whole-school response for the development of community cohesion and plans are underway for a new strategy to be adopted in the next academic year.

Governors are not yet sufficiently involved in the life of the school to be effective in challenging managers to address weaknesses and bring about improvements. Recently they have been linked to departments and are now invited to attend subject evaluation meetings.

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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
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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4

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
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	2
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	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
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	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

11 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Royal Docks Community School, London, E16 3HS

I am writing to tell you about the outcomes of the recent inspection of your school. Thank you for sharing your views with us. We spoke to a good number of you formally, informally and in lessons. Many of you told us how you thought behaviour at the school had improved. Those of you in Year 11 felt there was a much greater emphasis on you doing well than there had been in the past. You told us you feel safe at school and know who to turn to if you need help. You like the new reward system which recognises those of you who are trying hard to do your best. You are proud that a student in Year 10 has been elected as the Young Mayor of Newham and is representing your views in the community.

Inspectors have come back to your school three times in the last three years to check whether it is improving sufficiently. We are concerned that too many of you are still not getting high enough grades in your GCSEs. When we observed lessons, we saw too many in which the teaching was not good enough and where you were not sufficiently challenged to do your best. We have therefore placed your school in special measures. This means the school will get extra support and guidance to help it improve more rapidly than has been the case during the last three years.

We have asked the school to make the following improvements:

- rapidly raise standards and achievement
- make lessons more interesting and ensure activities are varied, matched to your needs and support you to reach challenging targets
- ensure all teachers give you feedback and good advice on how you can improve your work when they mark your books
- improve the way managers keep a check on the quality of provision and plan improvements
- ensure managers are clear about what they expect to happen as the result of action taken to improve standards and achievement.

You need to play your part by respecting your teachers. In some lessons some of you misbehave and this stops others from learning. Too many of you are still late for school or do not attend regularly. We are confident you will do your best to work with your teachers. Inspectors will be coming back regularly to the school to make sure it is improving.

Yours faithfully

Jennifer Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector