

The Royal Liberty School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102343
Local Authority	Havering
Inspection number	335882
Inspection dates	30 September –1 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Asyia Kazmi 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	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	575
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	G Woodman
Headteacher	J Deery
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 33 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at school improvement planning, school policies, curriculum and teachers' planning, students' work and minutes of the governing body. In addition, nearly 125 parental questionnaires, 100 student questionnaires and 37 staff questionnaires were scrutinised.

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

- the achievement of students across the school and in English
- how well teaching, including the use of assessment, challenges all learners to do well, including higher-attaining students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the effectiveness of leaders at all levels in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school in order to promote improvement.

Information about the school

The Royal Liberty is a small school. The large majority of students are White British, with approximately a fifth of students representing a wide range of minority ethnic heritages. Over 30 different languages are spoken by this group.

The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. Over a third of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities; this is well above average. These students have predominantly moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, social or emotional difficulties. A higher-than-average proportion of students join or leave the school at times other than normal.

The school was awarded specialist science college status in 2006 and has a Sportsmark award.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The Royal Liberty School is a good school. The headteacher with her focused, considered approach has set a clear, inclusive vision for the school which is shared by the majority of staff. Her high expectations for students, combined with the strong direction provided by the senior leadership team, have resulted in standards rising rapidly over the last few years. As a result of a strategic focus on improving outcomes through robust tracking of data, a tailored curriculum, improved teaching and learning and targeted intervention, all students achieve at least one qualification and virtually all achieve at least five GCSE passes. Senior leaders' evaluation of the strengths and areas for development are rooted in robust systems to check the work of the school and this combined with their ability to critically reflect on the school ensures their evaluation is accurate and supports their capacity for continued improvement.

In English, although students make significantly better progress than similar students nationally, standards are not as high as in the school's specialist subjects of mathematics and science. Instability in staffing has now been addressed, and teachers have taken strong and effective action to raise standards in English, including providing extra support for those who need it and developing a more robust approach to literacy across the curriculum.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan well-structured, well-paced lessons. Many are skilled in modelling effectively how to develop key skills in their subjects and this, combined with additional support for students when they need it, ensures that students make good progress. However, the use of assessment to improve students' learning is not always embedded in teachers' daily practice. This means that higher-attaining students are not always fully challenged and marking does not consistently guide students in how they can improve their work. On occasions teachers overly lead lessons, limiting opportunities for students to develop as independent learners.

The school community is a harmonious one. A priority for senior leaders had been to ensure students' behaviour prepares them well for learning, and in this they have been successful. Students are well mannered, polite and courteous. They work well in pairs and groups and demonstrate a healthy competitive spirit. They enjoy the many clubs, visits and trips on offer. Students are well prepared for their future lives. They articulate well how the skills they acquire through the curriculum, for example in information and communication technology, as well as the good quality work placements secured by staff, have a direct impact on their life beyond school.

Governors are supportive and are beginning to develop their role in holding the school

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to account for the standards students reach, but they are overly reliant on the headteacher to provide information. Senior leaders ensure that the school community is cohesive, but the work in strategically developing students' cultural awareness and national and global links is in its early stages.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure governors are robust in holding the school to account for the standards attained by students, and have greater involvement in evaluating the work of the school.
- Ensure senior leaders are strategic in promoting all aspects of community cohesion.
- Build on the strengths in teaching and learning by ensuring assessment practice is consistent, in particular, ensure:
 - teachers check students' understanding in lessons in order to tailor teaching to match their needs, particularly for the most able
 - feedback given to students guides them clearly on how to improve in order to accelerate their progress further
 - teaching develops students' independence in learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students have good attitudes to learning and in many, but not all, lessons their behaviour is exemplary. In lessons observed, they persevere with the tasks that are set for them even when they find it difficult, and often this tenacity pays dividends, ensuring they make good progress. Staff have created an environment where students are confident to seek help when they need it. Students are supportive of each other; this was seen in how they help each other in lessons but also out of lessons when students from different year groups voluntarily undertake shared reading. Students have mature attitudes; they understand the need for additional support and are happy to commit extra time to improving their literacy skills, including through online programmes. They also respond maturely when sanctions are applied on the occasions when their behaviour is not always good. When given the chance, students demonstrate good independent learning skills and accurate and thoughtful reflection on their own learning. Students enjoy school because they feel they are acquiring new skills, have staff who care about them and are able to take part in many clubs, activities, sports and visits. Particularly successful was the Rocket club that won the UK and the USA championships. Students feel safe and are confident that if misdemeanours occur they will always be dealt with well.

Students join the school with below-average standards, particularly in English, and leave with broadly average standards. In the school's specialist subjects, standards have improved substantially and the proportion of students achieving good GCSE passes in mathematics and science is above average. Those students who join the school other than at the start of Year 7 are supported well and have a buddy assigned to them. In a significant number of cases, careful scrutiny of data by senior leaders shows that despite

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targeted support those who arrived in the school late, particularly those joining after Year 10, do not make progress as rapidly as those students who have been at the school from the start. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because skilled support staff ensure they are able to access the lesson, develop key vocabulary and acquire new skills.

There are many opportunities for students to contribute to their school and the wider community, for example as members of the green team, science ambassadors and sports leaders. The prefects are particularly valued by the Year 7 students, who appreciate their role in ensuring a smooth transition to secondary school and feel comfortable in approaching them for support. The school council is active and its members have a real potential to inform school improvement through attending appropriate senior leadership meetings.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Students are very positive about their teachers; they report that teachers are 'friendly, kind and helpful'. Teaching is good because:

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

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- teachers have established calm, work-focused learning environments
- teachers have good subject knowledge and understand how to structure learning for students, particularly for those who find some aspects of learning difficult, to ensure they make good progress
- additional adults maintain good behaviour and provide focused teaching in order to ensure those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress
- good questioning techniques are used to ensure students are confident to explain their answers and further develop their speaking and listening skills
- students are often given opportunities to work collaboratively in order to learn from each other and refine their understanding
- a range of intervention programmes is in place to ensure all students make the progress they are capable of.

Some teachers give students opportunity to take control of their own learning, although this is not always the case, and there are others who overly direct lessons, which sometimes slows the pace of learning. Some teachers are skilled at checking students' understanding and tailoring their teaching as a result but this practice is not consistent across the school. Also, teachers do not always fully utilise the skills of support staff by giving them a clearly defined, active focus in lessons.

In this small school, staff know students very well. Senior leaders have developed robust systems to check that students are making the progress they are capable of. A strong feature of this system is that students' progress is discussed regularly by senior and middle leaders, both those in charge of subjects but also those who have pastoral responsibilities. However, making better use of assessment information to support students' learning in lessons is rightly a key focus for senior leaders. They have provided training and included students in evaluating the impact of this work. Through lesson observations and learning walks they are aware of where practice is strong and where it needs to develop further.

The curriculum is broad and reviewed regularly. The school's specialism has had a significant impact in improving outcomes and enhancing provision, including through additional courses such as engineering, astronomy and geology. Opportunities have been explicitly developed for students to gain experience of further and higher education, including establishing links with institutions such as the London School of Economics. This raises students' aspirations, especially for those who may be considering undergraduate studies for the first time. Meaningful work placements such as shadowing consultants in hospitals also contribute to broadening students' horizons. As a result of staffing instability the consolidation of literacy across the curriculum has not been fully established, but this is being addressed. There is close collaboration between key departments in ensuring those who need additional help get it, and specially trained support staff deliver programmes to improve students' reading and writing skills. There is a programme in place to ensure that Year 7 students utilise their form time to develop personal, learning and thinking skills; however, in other year groups this time is not always used to develop students' wider skills.

The school works with a wide range of organisations to ensure students receive good

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care and support. Students recognise there is always someone to turn to and appreciate how teachers 'keep an eye on you'. The focus on preventative work such as anger management courses for students has had a positive impact, with a reduction in the number of exclusions, which are now below average.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, with the support of her senior leadership team, has established an ethos of high expectations which has the commitment of the majority of staff. The promotion of equality and improving the life chances of students is at the heart of the school's work. Staff have very clear and high aspirations for students and they understand well any barriers the students may have to achieving success. They actively work to overcome them; the impact of their work is seen in the rapidly improving standards and the high proportion of students who continue on in education, employment or training.

Rigorous procedures to check the quality of the school's work are followed through with support for staff. Senior leaders have developed the skills of middle leaders in evaluating performance in their areas, and have established rigour in holding middle leaders to account for this performance. Pastoral roles have been developed so they are more focused on students' achievement, and many staff reported on the improved practice and consistency as a result of collaboration between senior and middle leaders.

Senior leaders have facilitated staff development through support for those who wish to take on postgraduate studies in education, and are utilising their learning to drive further improvements in school. There is a good focus on sharing the expertise that already exists in the school to improve teaching through coaching as well as making use of external courses. Action has been taken to minimise the impact of turbulence in staffing, including training for support staff, but in a few cases the school has experienced difficulties in recruiting high-calibre staff to cover longer-term staff absences. There are strong systems in place to safeguard students.

The school has established good links with a range of partners to improve outcomes for students. These include local school collaboration to fund posts such as a shared counsellor, links with colleges to enhance the curriculum and links with universities to raise students' aspirations. Senior leaders are at the early stages of planning actions which promote students' links to and understanding of the wide range of communities

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present in the UK.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of the parents are very positive about the work of the school. A few expressed a need to have more information about the courses students are embarking on and the expectations regarding homework so that they are better placed to support their children.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Royal Liberty School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 125 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 575 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	41	58	54	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	43	40	61	57	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	40	37	57	53	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	36	57	53	3	3	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	41	38	60	56	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	25	70	65	3	3	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	24	69	65	6	6	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	34	32	60	56	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	26	71	66	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	31	29	66	62	4	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	19	77	72	3	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	36	34	65	61	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	53	50	49	46	0	0	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



1 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Royal Liberty School, Romford RM2 6HJ

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you gave us. We valued the discussions we had with you and I would like to take this opportunity to share our findings with you.

Yours is a good school. As a result of good teaching you make good progress and standards are rising rapidly. Your progress in the school's specialist subjects is particularly impressive. Staff in your school have taken a wide range of actions to promote your development and well-being. These include good links with colleges and universities. You told us how much you valued the wide range of sporting opportunities and clubs on offer. You undertake many activities that help to improve your school. We were impressed with your manners and your good working relationships with each other. We found that your behaviour is good and sometimes excellent but we also know that on a few occasions this is not always the case. Your attendance has improved but it is important that this is improved further.

Your headteacher and senior leaders know your school very well, and we have asked them to take the following actions to improve it even further. You can also help by ensuring that you use avenues such as the school council to let the school know your views about how things can be improved.

- Governors are supportive of the school but we have asked them to be more robust in challenging senior leaders about the standards you attain.
- We have asked senior leaders to ensure they are strategic in ensuring you learn about and understand the wide range of communities that make up the UK and develop more international links.
- We would like the school to build on the strengths in teaching and learning by ensuring teachers make greater use of information about how well you are learning in lessons, so that all of you are challenged and you are given more detailed guidance on how to improve your work. We have also asked them to give you more opportunities to take control of your learning.

I wish you and your school every success.

Yours faithfully

Asyia Kazmi

Her Majesty's Inspector

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