

Grey Court School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102922
Local Authority	Richmond-Upon-Thames
Inspection number	335988
Inspection dates	11–12 February 2010
Reporting inspector	John Kennedy 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 of pupils on the school roll	870
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Frank Kitson
Headteacher	Ms Maggie Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	27 June 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of time observing learning. They visited 41 lessons or support sessions and observed 38 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and other staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, the School Improvement Partner, a local authority representative and three groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at some of its planning and evaluation documentation, policies and procedures, analyses of students' progress, and samples of the students' own work and records. They evaluated questionnaires from 126 parents or carers, 34 staff and a representative sample from 210 students.

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

- the progress made by students in English
- the progress made by different groups of students, especially those entitled to free school meals
- the impact of teaching, particularly in regard to the use of assessment and teachers' skills in stretching students in their learning
- provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and its impact on their outcomes.

Information about the school

Grey Court is a slightly smaller than average school. The decline in numbers on roll since the last inspection has been reversed and the school is now oversubscribed in Year 7. Students are predominantly of White British heritage. About a third of the students come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds and this proportion, which is increasing, is above average. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is also above average, although the number of students who are at an early stage of fluency in English is low. About one in five students has entitlement to free school meals. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. Their needs are varied and primarily include behavioural, emotional or social difficulties, and moderate learning difficulties. The number in receipt of a statement of special educational needs is in line with similar schools nationally. The school gained combined specialist status for science, mathematics and computing in 2003. Grey Court also provides extended services, such as out-of-hours learning.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Grey Court provides a sound education for its students. It is improving rapidly and securely as a result of inspirational leadership. When the school was last inspected, achievement and equality of opportunity were judged to be inadequate and students' personal development and well-being, the quality of their care, guidance and support, and leadership and management were satisfactory. All these aspects of the school have improved markedly. Parents, staff and students comment very positively about this turnaround, although the school has had a lot of ground to make up and the legacy of previous weaknesses means that achievement and teaching are not yet consistently good.

Students feel safe in a welcoming, caring and very supportive environment, and consequently they develop into well-rounded individuals. Staff provide them with excellent opportunities to make a positive difference and this is reflected in the major contribution they make to the school and wider community.

Year 11 results improved in 2009. However, while the students concerned had made satisfactory progress, their attainment was not consistent across subjects. They achieved high standards in science and modern foreign languages, but results were disappointing in other subjects such as English, mathematics and art. Some groups, such as those who speak English as an additional language, made good progress. Others, such as those eligible for free school meals, did not make sufficient gains in their learning. Historically, progress in English has not been strong enough, and outcomes have been lower than in science and mathematics. Targets in the school's specialist areas were met in science and information and communication technology (ICT), but mathematics does not contribute as strongly to the school's performance.

The school is tackling these inconsistencies with determination and success. Current progress in English has accelerated and over three fifths of the students in Year 11 have already gained at least a C grade in English language. The school's reliable data and evidence from work in lessons indicate that students are on track to make more substantial gains across subjects. A number of key factors are contributing to this more positive picture, particularly improvements in the quality of teaching and the fact that the current Year 11 students are the first to benefit from a more tailored curriculum. Nevertheless, in some lessons a minority of students are not yet being sufficiently stretched in their learning by challenging activities, and students are not always clear about how to improve their work.

The ambitious leadership of the headteacher and her strong and effective team of senior leaders are driving this change. Improvement strategies emanate from accurate

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self-evaluation and systematic monitoring of progress. Leaders know where their strengths lie and what remaining weaknesses need to be tackled. Their strong determination to succeed, the willingness of staff to go the extra mile and the clear improvements made since the last inspection, particularly over the last year, are the bedrock of the school's good capacity to sustain this trend of improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards by:
 - accelerating the progress that students are making in English and mathematics so that attainment is above the national average
 - reducing variability between subjects so that performance is consistently at least in line with national expectations.
- Ensure that the great majority of teaching across all subjects is consistently good by:
 - placing a greater focus on assessing the learning of every student during lessons
 - stretching students in their learning so that the majority make good progress
 - providing students with consistently good feedback so that they know what steps they need to take to improve their grades.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Lessons are characterised by a very positive rapport between staff and students. Classrooms are orderly, calm and positive working environments. Students enjoy their learning, and are well motivated and attentive. Generally they persevere in their work, behave well and are actively involved in their learning. They are keen to do well and they grow in confidence as they respond to teachers' well-targeted questioning, encouragement and support. In lessons where some students lose focus and interest it is because the pace of the lesson is not right or they are not sufficiently captivated by the activities. As a result of focused improvement strategies and better teaching, standards seen in students' books and in lessons were seen to have risen in the key subjects of English and mathematics. The majority of pupils in Year 11 are now making the progress expected of them and some are making good progress. However, this still represents only satisfactory long-term progress for these students.

School leaders rigorously identify any individuals or groups who are underachieving and they are deploying a wide repertoire of successful strategies to intervene and make a difference. This ensures that any gaps between groups are being reduced. For example, a group of students receiving free school meals who were falling behind were supported with business mentors and this has improved the pace of their learning. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers. Among this group, the students who receive assistance that goes beyond action by the school are making good progress because of the quality of targeted support. Students who are

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the most vulnerable make good progress for similar reasons.

Students adopt healthy lifestyles and this is particularly exemplified in their enjoyment of and participation in sport, cycling to school and their good sense of what constitutes healthy living. Nonetheless a few parents and students feel that further improvements could be made in relation to the range of healthy food on offer. Students benefit from the good range of opportunities to develop enterprise and work-related skills. The success of the school in helping them build bridges to the world of work and ongoing learning can be seen in higher than average numbers of those going on to other education, employment or training. Attendance is only average because some students, particularly in Year 11, do not attend as regularly as others, despite the school's best efforts.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	1
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?

Almost two thirds of the teaching observed was good, closely matching the school's own evaluation. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and use ICT to good effect. In the best lessons, confident and skilled teachers employ a wide repertoire of well-designed

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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activities to engage the students. They check on students' understanding and provide good opportunities for them to assess their own progress and that of their peers. Teachers' use of 'how' and 'why' questions helps students deepen their learning. These strengths are not always present. In some lessons, students are too passive; in others the pace is not finely tuned, so that students either lose concentration when the tempo is slow or are not given time to reflect and make their learning secure when it is too fast. Teachers manage whole-class teaching well and staff have excellent data about how groups and individuals are doing. However, they do not always use this information to pay sufficient attention to the quality of learning of each student in the lesson. Some students are aware of their targets and have a good understanding of levels and targets, but not are clear what next steps they need to take to reach them.

Students benefit from a personalised curriculum that meets their differing aptitudes and contributes greatly to their enjoyment of learning. The specialist school status enhances it through, for instance, the wide range of science options on offer, early entry opportunities for students in mathematics and science and a focus on ensuring that all students gain accreditation in ICT. Extended learning opportunities, such as in mathematics, contribute to improved achievement. The school also broadens the learning opportunities for both its own students and the wider community, such as local primary schools, through its ICT provision. The school's staff and visiting experts enrich the curriculum by offering a range of master classes, for example on the piano and classical mythology. The curriculum provides effectively for students at both ends of the ability spectrum through booster and other targeted programmes. The school has plans to broaden its curriculum offer from September through extending its vocational provision.

Students are well cared for, particularly those who are the most vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Consistently applied systems and high expectations promote positive behaviour and attitudes, and there has been a significant reduction in exclusions and persistent absentees. Students benefit from very effective transition support, particularly those who are new to the school. They have confidence in turning to staff for any help they need and consequently feel secure and able to grow in confidence. Care, guidance and support are good rather than outstanding because the school rightly evaluates that it needs to ensure that classroom support is more consistently embedded for pupils with additional needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher leads with determination and unwavering focus on continuous improvement, and she is well supported by a resolute leadership team. Their passion and commitment to continually improve, which they refer to as their 'moral purpose' are shared by governors and the staff as a whole and run through the veins of the school. The upbeat staff ethos is reflected in exceptionally positive responses to the inspection questionnaire from the newest to the most experienced staff, summed up by one who wrote, 'We are on the way up again ' it's great to be part of this.' The staff know that they are not quite there yet, particularly in securing consistently good teaching across the school. Leaders hold staff and each other to account through thorough systems for quality assurance, including regular and laser-sharp tracking of students' progress. They provide a good balance of support, professional development and intervention when they identify weaknesses, paying close attention to the progress of individuals. This enables them to successfully promote equality, and extends beyond academic progress. For example, they monitor the actual contribution that each student makes to the community and they create new opportunities so that everyone is given the same chance to make a positive difference.

The school places high priority on safeguarding students and this is underpinned by clear policies and procedures and regular training for staff. Grey Court is an inclusive and cohesive community which is also outward looking. The school promotes community cohesion at a local level through a wide range of meaningful partnerships and specific initiatives such as an artwork project with elderly residents. This helped young and old to learn and work together. The school's action plan has helped it to identify further opportunities to extend its reach, and its developing links with a school in Bangkok reflect this ambition.

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	2
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	2

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money

3

Views of parents and carers

Most parents or carers who completed the questionnaire were positive about all aspects of the school. A significant number singled out praise for the leadership of the headteacher and her staff. A small number of parents or carers raised individual concerns, for example about the school's website not being up to date and variable teaching between subjects. Inspectors agree that there is too much variability in teaching, and inspectors are aware that the school has plans in place to develop the website in the near future.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Grey Court 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 126 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 870 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	76	60	48	38	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	76	60	45	36	2	2	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	67	53	52	41	5	4	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	41	62	49	7	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	54	43	63	50	3	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	55	54	56	44	7	6	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	49	39	59	47	10	8	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)	68	54	43	34	2	2	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	46	52	41	9	7	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	67	53	46	37	6	5	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	61	48	46	37	8	6	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	92	73	29	23	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	87	69	31	25	4	3	0	0

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.



15 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Grey Court School, Richmond, TW10 7HN

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed our visit and learnt a lot from listening to you and seeing you at work in your lessons. You are right to be proud of your school. One of you wrote, 'This school just gets better and better.' This sums up our view really well. Grey Court is very well led by your headteacher, and other staff also play their part in making it the place that you and your parents value so highly. You should also take some of the credit. You behave well in lessons and you are eager to learn. The staff go out of their way to give you a chance to make your mark on the school and the wider community and you grasp these opportunities exceptionally well.

Staff care for you very well. They keep a close eye on how well you are doing and help those of you who are falling behind. You have a wide range of options to choose from and lots of extra activities and clubs to take part in. You told us that teaching has improved and we agree. We saw lots of good lessons. However, in a few lessons one or two of you are not learning as much as you can. We have asked the school to ensure that in all lessons teachers keep a close eye on how and what you are learning so that you can make even better progress. Some of you are occasionally unsure about the steps to take to move up a level or grade and we have asked the staff to make sure that they all give you feedback that helps you.

In previous years students did not always do as well as they could. In some subjects such as modern foreign languages and science, students did really well. However, in other subjects they could have done better, for example in English, and for some in mathematics. Things have changed and this year we can see that you are on track to do much better. This is another sign that the school is improving. We have asked the school to make sure that this continues by helping you and those who come after you to do much better in English and mathematics, and consistently well in other subjects. You can play your part by continuing to work as hard as you can. Most of you attend school well, although a few of you, especially in Year 11, could attend more often. This would help your chances of achieving the best you can.

Yours sincerely

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector

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