

Grange Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number111401Local AuthorityHaltonInspection number337680

Inspection dates13-14 October 2009Reporting inspectorLeszek Iwaskow HMI

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

Type of school Secondary
School category Community
Age range of pupils 11–16
Gender of pupils Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll 903

Appropriate authority The governing body

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Age group 11–16

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 38 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation including school policies and procedures, data and analysis about students' current performance, schemes of learning, monitoring reports and questionnaires completed by 64 parents and carers. Inspectors were unable to observe any Year 7 lessons since most of these students were off site on a residential visit.

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

- attainment and progress at Key Stage 3, especially in mathematics, to determine whether progress is being made securely and quickly enough
- the quality of learning in a range of different subjects to establish whether teaching is both challenging and supportive to enable all students to succeed
- how effectively the school promotes students' personal development, especially good behaviour and attendance
- the impact of leadership and management at all levels in improving outcomes for students and developing classroom practice.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average and serves an area of Runcorn with twice the level of social and economic disadvantage found nationally. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is almost double the national average. The great majority of students are White British. A few are of minority ethnic heritage and even fewer speak English as an additional language. Almost half of students are considered to have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the number of students with a statement of special educational needs is over twice the average. The school was under threat of closure until the summer of 2008 when it federated with the local nursery, infant and junior schools which share the same site. From 1 September 2010, the school will change its age range to establish a school for students aged 3 to 16 years. All the pupils from Grange Nursery, Infant and Junior schools will transfer to the Grange Comprehensive which will become The Grange School, a single all-through school. A special unit caters for the education of a small number of students who have behavioural, emotional or social difficulties, although this is due to close in 2011. The school also hosts a City Learning Centre on its site and holds a number of awards including the Sports England Sportsmark award, the Artsmark Gold award, the Financial Management Standard in Education award and the Inclusion Quality Mark award. It is also currently a National Challenge School.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The Grange Comprehensive School is an improving school which has emerged from a period of uncertainty about its future into a new one full of fresh opportunities and challenges. Currently, it has a satisfactory, but firm, platform on which it can build a strong future for its students and become a real hub of the community. The strong bonds formed between the community and the school as it fought for its survival remain and much goodwill and hope exists that the new school will develop into an example of innovative and effective practice.

The disruption has had some impact on developments, but has not distracted governors or management from the task of improving standards and students' achievement. Standards remain low, but are improving. However, given their below average starting points, many students make at least satisfactory progress. Nevertheless, the most able are not always sufficiently challenged in some lessons to reach their full potential. The overall trend is upwards and the school is rightly proud that is has passed National Challenge programme threshold targets.

Progress has been sustained but has not accelerated as quickly as had been hoped, partly because of the uncertainty of the school's future, but also because the quality of teaching remains only satisfactory. Teaching, in the majority of lessons, has been functional. This has ensured that students pass examinations with the emphasis on achievement and less on the enjoyment. However, there are examples of good and outstanding practice where teachers engage students in real learning and encourage a love of learning. When students perceive lessons to be relevant they are more willing to engage with the tasks set and rise to the challenges offered. They particularly enjoy those lessons where they can become practically involved rather than being passive recipients of knowledge. When teachers talk too much, lessons are considered to be dull and can lead to some disruptive behaviour. The schemes of learning for many subjects are often too prescriptive and focus on coverage of content rather than on strategies which promote real progress in students' understanding of a subject.

The school has many positive attributes. For many students it is a safe haven where they feel happy and secure. As one student stated, 'This school is the best and I don't want to leave (at the end of the day).' Good care and guidance are key aspects in students' personal development and growth. Action taken by the school has improved attendance and it is now broadly average. There is a strong emphasis on providing good support for vulnerable groups of pupils who, in some cases, make good progress and are closing the gap on their peers. Students are excited by the thought that, soon, they will see a new school being built specifically for them.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. There is recognition among governors and managers that there are areas which need further improvement and development. They understand that weak practice in lessons needs to be more firmly challenged in order to improve learning. They also accept that more needs to be done to promote a better understanding of the richness and diversity of cultures, faith values and traditions both in their immediate surroundings and in the world around them. The school has too few links beyond their immediate locality. Students have a strong sense of identity and loyalty to the school, but lack a strong understanding of the world in which they live and in which they can build a future for themselves through hard work and enterprise. Currently, the curriculum does not provide sufficient opportunities for students to experience the world of work through work-related or vocational activities.

There is a determination to succeed. There is also a realisation that, although the foundations are in place, the school needs to live up to its motto, 'Aim high in all things', by accelerating the progress that has already been made to ensure that the new school is a success. This is something that parents and carers, teachers and students can be truly proud of.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve learning in the classroom by:
 - developing students as more independent learners
 - embedding the philosophy of learning to learn into everyday lessons
 - ensuring that assessment informs planning and next steps in learning
 - ensuring that information and communication technology (ICT) is used more interactively to engage with students.
- Ensure that management at all levels takes an active responsibility in accelerating improvements in learning in order to raise standards further.
- Ensure that the curriculum and schemes of learning are relevant and meet the needs of all students.
- Embed community cohesion more fully into the life of the school to develop students' awareness of the world beyond Runcorn.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

In most lessons students have a positive attitude, are attentive and eager to learn. In those lessons which are seen as relevant and meaningful students' involvement is greater, their behaviour is better and they respond by making good progress. In a history lesson imaginative use of a Blind Date scenario, with Cilla le Noire in the chair, provided a familiar setting in which students had to choose a husband for Elizabeth I.

Students' responded to the challenge by considering the complexities of court life to develop a good understanding of the politics of the Tudor period. Equally, in a drama lesson, students developed a real empathy with homeless people because of the use of relaxation techniques which enabled them to get into character and produce a performance which was both outstanding and moving.

However, in too many lessons students are too dependant on the teachers and often have to work through tasks which occupy them rather than develop their thinking. Where tasks are closely controlled by the teacher the greater majority of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress but few make good progress. The learning of the more able students in particular is inhibited because they are not given time to reflect, think, discuss or formulate their own opinions. Where lessons are mundane students sometimes become restless. As one remarked, 'Our behaviour lets us down and we learn little.'

Standards are low but are improving quickly. The percentage of students attaining five or more A* to C grades (including English and mathematics) at GCSE has improved and remain above National Challenge threshold targets. Vulnerable groups such as school action students and those with a statement of special educational needs attain significantly better than expected, while those entitled to free school meals do better than similar students nationally. Few students, however, attain the highest grades (A* to A). Standards are better in examination classes than at Key Stage 3, where standards in mathematics remain disappointing. Progress accelerates in Years 10 and 11 because of the focused teaching, matched closely to examination requirements.

Most students enjoy coming to school and their attendance is satisfactory. They have a clear understanding of the need to make healthy choices in life. One student even pointed out during lunch, 'At the end of dinner cakes are left.' However, evidence from packed lunches indicates that not all students choose the healthy option. Students feel safe in school, understand threats to their health and safety and have confidence that the school will deal quickly and effectively when incidents, including bullying, arise. Students develop basic skills well, but have fewer opportunities to develop workplace skills. They look upon school as a place they can socialise and make friends; however, opportunities to develop a wider understanding of other faiths and cultures are missed. Many students have an insular outlook and remain unaware of the wider world, its rich diversity and the many opportunities offered.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3	
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4	
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		
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles		
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community		
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being		
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3	
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		

How effective is the provision?

were also observed by inspectors. However, these were the exception rather than the norm. In the majority of the lessons the focus is on teaching rather than learning. In these lessons learning is managed rather than liberated. The teacher frequently guides students through a succession of tasks to ensure that they get the right answer rather than understand how they got to it. These lessons are often tightly structured so that students are not able to develop their ideas or record their work in sufficient depth. Technology is often used as a substitute for the blackboard and as a means of providing students with information rather than engaging in meaningful interaction. These lessons are often dominated by the teacher with students often occupied and not challenged. In such lessons the more able students are often working well within their capabilities. In those lessons where students are engaged and interested, teachers use a range of approaches and are aware of students' preferred learning styles. Students identified that they were more involved in such lessons and they enjoyed opportunities to work practically and collaboratively. They were clear about what they were expected to do because the teacher had clearly modelled how to access the task. In these lessons students were enthusiastic and motivated and were pleased to show off their achievements. One younger student at the end of a lesson was keen to show the inspector his work, including a poem about life in the trenches during the First World War. Despite the fact that he had learning difficulties he was beaming with pride and stated, 'It's fun learning in this class – my work is getting better.' The inspector agreed.

The curriculum meets basic requirements and is satisfactory overall. The school is aware

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, although outstanding and good lessons

that those students who do not opt for physical education at GCSE are limited to only one hour of physical education which is below national recommendations. Equally, the school does not fully meet requirements for citizenship at Key Stage 3 since the course is spread over both key stages through the personal, social, health and citizenship education programme. Students have a wide choice of GCSE subjects, but the number of vocational pathways is very limited. The learning to learn programme is taught discretely and is enjoyed by students who state that it has helped them in various aspects of their work. However, it has not yet been integrated into many schemes of learning throughout the school. These focus often on coverage rather than learning. As a result, implementation of learning strategies is patchy in many lessons. Apart from after-school sporting opportunities, the range and take-up of extra-curricular activities is also limited. Students enjoy opportunities to visit places outside their sphere of experience. The trip to Paris was a highlight and gifted and talented students benefit from cultural visits to museums, the theatre and to experience life at a university. However, not all students are able to participate and many have a narrow perspective of life beyond Runcorn.

The school provides a welcoming environment which actively promotes the personal development and well-being of students. Pastoral support for students and their families is strong. The school works well with external agencies, and parents and carers to improve their quality of life. Support impacts positively on students' behaviour as shown, for example, by improved attendance for specific individuals. Teaching assistants and learning mentors are important team members. There are clear systems in place for target setting and tracking of students' progress driven by the need to respond to National Challenge requirements. Transition arrangements are robust. Good use of data facilitates early intervention to meet the needs of individuals. While data is used effectively to monitor progress, it is not used consistently in the classroom to support learning. Marking, and self-assessment by students, are patchy across the school. Students were not always clear about what they needed to do to take next steps forward in their learning.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The threat of closure united the whole school community and resulted in an ambitious vision for the future. This is due to become a reality next September when the school

becomes an all-through school for students aged 3 to 16. As a result, certain matters have been in abeyance until the position was clarified. Currently, there is a transitional governing body in place until a full group is reconstituted in time for the opening of the new school. Systems have been established to monitor performance and provide a cohesive framework for raising standards in response to the requirements of being in the National Challenge programme. These targets have been met. Time and effort has also been invested in training middle managers. However, insufficient effort has been made in implementing plans to improve approaches to teaching and especially learning in the classroom and tackling teaching which is less than good.

The school promotes equality of opportunity well and monitors the well-being and performance of different groups and individuals diligently. Safeguarding policies are in place and procedures to monitor students' welfare are rigorous. The school is closing the gap by improving the performance of groups of more vulnerable pupils, but acknowledges that there is still some way to go. The good relationships, that were fostered when parents and carers rallied around the school to ensure its future, have been maintained. Many parents and carers praise the work of the school and what has been achieved for their children. As one parent stated eloquently 'The school has enabled my older child to go on to great success. It has an excellent pastoral system which caters for both the able and less able.' The school is aware that many of the students have a narrow perspective of the world and limited understanding of other ethnic groups, faiths and cultures. A draft policy to promote community cohesion has not yet been approved by the transitional governing body and the school acknowledges it is only taking the first steps towards developing this aspect. Apart from a tenuous link through modern foreign languages with Beziers in France, the school has no contact with schools in other countries or contrasting places which can provide students with experience of other localities and cultures and broaden their horizons.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement		
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3	
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	3	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination		
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2	
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	4	

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			
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3		

Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires were received from a small proportion of parents and carers. The large majority who responded to the inspection questionnaire were pleased with their children's experiences in the school. In the main they were positive about the support their children were receiving if they had specific learning difficulties or needs. They were also pleased with the care the school provided. Behaviour, particularly in some classes, was their major area of concern and the impact that this might have on their children's education. Although behaviour is broadly satisfactory inspectors agreed that this was in issue in a small number of classes. A very small number also expressed worries about too many supply teachers taking certain classes. Observation of lessons by inspectors did not suggest that this was a major issue currently. Other issues raised covered several areas and in the main related to the individual parent or carer concerned.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Grange Comprehensive 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 64 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 903 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	47	60	47	6	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	56	44	66	52	4	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	60	48	62	49	0	0	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	60	48	56	44	8	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	56	44	68	54	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	42	33	80	63	2	2	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	19	92	72	10	8	0	0
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)	40	32	82	66	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	48	38	68	54	8	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	44	35	58	47	18	15	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	38	31	76	62	4	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	48	38	72	58	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	52	41	66	52	6	5	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 oustanding 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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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:	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.
	 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 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Grange Comprehensive School, Runcorn, WA7 5DX

Thank you for making me and my team of inspectors feel very welcome. This letter is to tell you about our recent visit to your school to inspect the quality of the education you are experiencing. The inspectors particularly enjoyed meeting you and talking to you about your lessons, the activities you are involved in and how you are treated and looked after. We found what you told us to be very interesting and informative and it helped us come to the decision that your school is an improving school which provides you with a satisfactory standard of education. Although there are some aspects which are good, particularly the way in which the school supports and looks after you, there still remain areas which need to be made even better.

You are proud of your school and your achievements and many of you try hard in most lessons, especially when you find them interesting. There are times, however, when the behaviour of a small minority prevents the rest of you from getting on with your work. If the school is to make more rapid progress you need to play your part and make a greater effort to concentrate on your work and not become distracted. You particularly enjoy those lessons, such as learning to learn, which allow you actively to participate, discuss and express your own views and opinions. We have asked the teachers to consider the way they teach, involve you more in lessons and give you more opportunities to take greater responsibility for your learning. We have also asked them to look at what they actually teach and make the learning meaningful and relevant for you.

When you spoke to us you identified that you particularly benefited and learnt a lot from visits and experiences outside the classroom. To many of you this brought learning to life and made you more aware of the exciting and diverse world outside Runcorn. Visits to Paris, London and other places of interest in the region really caught your imagination. The inspectors feel that more could be done to engage you in real-life experiences which will benefit you and motivate you do even better.

Your headteacher is determined to work with all his staff to ensure that these improvements are put in place as soon as possible to support your learning and experiences in the school. With your help and cooperation I am sure they will succeed.

On behalf of the inspection team I wish you all the best for your future lives and careers.

Yours faithfully

Leszek Iwaskow

Her Majesty's Inspector

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