

Ridgeway School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113535
Local Authority	City of Plymouth
Inspection number	338199
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1256
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	310
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Willis
Headteacher	John Didymus
Date of previous school inspection	9 October 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 37 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self evaluation and planning documents, risk assessments, policy documents, students' books, student questionnaires, staff questionnaires and 182 parental questionnaires.

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

- whether all groups of students in the school make good progress
- the quality of teaching and the impact this has on students' learning in lessons
- the impact of the school's care, guidance and support on Every Child Matters outcomes in the school for all groups of students including the most vulnerable.
- the capacity of the school leadership to bring about further improvement
- the work of the school's sixth form

Information about the school

Ridgeway is a typical sized comprehensive with a growing sixth form. It occupies a sprawling site either side of a public right of way. The school has specialist science college status. Most students are White British. Very few students speak English as an additional language. A specialist facility for students who have specific learning difficulties is integrated into the curriculum. Fewer students than average have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, the proportion of students who have a statement of educational needs is above the national average. The school has been awarded the International School Award in 2006 and National Healthy School Status and Gold Travel Plan in 2009.

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

There are a number of strong features that make Ridgeway school popular with parents and students. In particular, the curriculum successfully offers all its students some outstanding academic, vocational and social experiences. As a consequence students from a wide range of backgrounds enjoy their time at school, develop strong bonds with each other and the adults that work with them, and develop positive values. It is no surprise that the majority continue on into the sixth form. These features, strengths at the last inspection, have grown. Directed by the passionate leadership of the headteacher, students are impeccably supported and nurtured through a range of integrated strategies. These have been of particular benefit to those with more complex needs who make the best of what is on offer and learn as well as their peers. Leaders and governors are outward-looking, sensibly weighing up the benefit of opportunities provided in the wider educational community, and commit wholeheartedly where the benefits are apparent to students. No more evident is this than with its impressive sports offer and engagement, at an international level, with the climate change and environmental agenda, that contributes to some excellent outcomes in health and participation.

There has been an upward shift in teachers' expectations and while this has not yet been enough to ensure that all students make the best possible progress, standards have risen over the last three years on most measures including five or more GCSE grades A* to C with English and mathematics. Teaching is good and it is this that motivates students. While assessment data are collected they are not checked rigorously by all middle leaders, including in the sixth form, to see which students are falling behind and where. Consequently, teachers do not always have sufficient information about the relative progress of individual students over time, and expectations of students are not consistently high enough. This is evident in the level of questioning in some lessons that fails to challenge students or make them think that bit harder.

Ridgeway School offers a safe environment. Any rare bullying incidents are dealt with effectively and promptly. Behaviour seen during the inspection was very good in class and around the site but a minority of the students surveyed expressed some concern about the behaviour of a few, especially with regard to low-level disruption. Student response to the school's health promotion work is outstanding. The school's concern for the cultural awareness of its students is deeply embedded. This, combined with strong links with more ethnically diverse communities at home and abroad, encourages students of all ages to think deeply about their own and others' experiences, relating them to personal values. This facilitates openness to new ideas, an appreciation of cultural diversity and a readiness to challenge racism.

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The school knows itself well and the headteacher, along with experienced staff and the challenge from governors, has managed change skilfully, ensuring that staff morale is high. Evaluation of the quality of teaching has been used well to improve achievement in English and mathematics. Although effective use of assessment information is not yet fully embedded in the sixth form and main school, some middle leaders are becoming more adept at using tracking data to intervene positively where students fall behind their challenging targets, particularly in Years 7 and 8. The resulting rise in GCSE results coupled to sustained strength in Every Child Matters outcomes demonstrate good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Focus leadership at all levels more sharply on tracking of student progress in order to raise expectations in the classroom:
- by implementing more rigorous monitoring systems
- making it the priority objective in all departmental improvement plans.
- Increase the effectiveness of teaching on students' learning and progress by:
- ensuring that teachers use assessment information to provide more challenging questions
- providing more opportunities for students to reflect on their learning in lessons.

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

Students' achievement is satisfactory. Attainment is average with an upward trend in the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE A* to C including English and mathematics. This measure is above average. However, there is some inconsistency between subjects. In particular, attainment in the specialist subject of science has been below the school's challenging targets... Mathematics results have been above average for the last three years and English grades are now broadly in line with expectations. The number of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics increased in 2009 and matched published school targets of 52%.

Progress is satisfactory in the school. Any identified underachievement is now being tackled quickly through a combination of targeted intervention, departmental initiatives and changes to the curriculum. For example, lower-ability students underachieved in the cohort that completed their examinations in 2008 but the school worked successfully with this ability group in 2009 and those completing their GCSEs this year made progress in line with their peers. The science faculty is benefiting from new leadership that is giving clearer direction to course design, although interim examination results still indicate challenging targets are being missed. Key Stage 3 progress is satisfactory based on existing data for all groups of students; the majority of students are on track to reach their expected targets. No group is currently underachieving significantly in the school. Overall, the more able students make good progress to reach their challenging targets. Effective specialist support ensures that students who have identified special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress.

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In a large majority of lessons observed by inspectors, respectful student behaviour enhanced enjoyment of and engagement with learning. Student's relationships with teaching staff are mostly excellent and an atmosphere of trust allows them to respond positively to the work set. Collaborative learning is particularly successful when implemented. Where learning is slowed it is usually because some teachers fail to provide enough opportunities to promote learning through well-matched and challenging questions. This can lead to students losing focus and detracts from their learning.

Students, including those who are vulnerable, feel very safe in the school. They adopt safe ways of working in practical subjects. A small minority of parents and students identified the proximity of a public right of way as a concern and this holds back outcomes from being higher. The students have an excellent attitude towards healthy lifestyles and their participation in the wide range of sporting opportunities is high. The impressive range of extra-curricular activities also gives all students significant opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community which they readily accept in large numbers. Similarly, activities which link with schools in Africa, environmental groups, local music and dance projects and the school's general ethos all facilitate outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

As a result of average standards, good attendance and punctuality, coupled with effective work-related programmes, students gain good skills for their life beyond the school. With the excellent guidance students receive, very few fail to go on to education, training or employment.

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	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1

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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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	2
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Much work has been undertaken through in-service training and building partnerships with other schools to improve the provision. There is greater consistency about the strong features of teaching throughout the school. These include a clear focus on the learning at the start of the lesson and the use of the final part of the lesson to help students draw this together. Lessons are engaging with a good balance of practical activities, discussion and group working. Inspectors looked at some of the teaching considered most effective by the school. In many lessons they found students working and learning enthusiastically in small groups. In these lessons, teacher support and peer and self-assessment, with clear criteria, were being used well to help students move on; learning was fast-paced. In the very best lessons time was taken during and at the end of the lesson to assess students' progress effectively and refocus their learning if necessary. Despite regular assessment there is a lack of good quality information about students' progress being fed back to the teachers. Consequently, the questions asked of students did not help them build on their learning or steer them towards their own objectives. The marking in books is general and does not always focus students on their next steps. The good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning is well established. Teachers are increasingly confident in interactive whiteboard techniques to stimulate learning and sustain students' concentration and motivation.

The curriculum is under constant and careful review to ensure the best possible experience for all students. The curriculum is personalised extensively and there is a real sense of the school finding and delivering the right courses for the right students. For example, the increased applied and vocational learning provision on and off-site has been implemented carefully and has resulted in improved outcomes, particularly for students whose achievement would otherwise have been potentially low or very low. For the more able, science status has supported the delivery of separate sciences. Applied science has been introduced to better meet the needs of all students. Extra-curricular provision for students is outstanding both in take-up rates and the breadth of activities offered. Particularly impressive is the fact that it caters for all groups of students.

A group of vulnerable students spoke highly of the good relationships they enjoy with their teachers and the caring ethos within the school. Students say that staff ensure there are opportunities for them to catch up when they fall behind or miss work. Commissioned services for identified students are strong and the provision for encouraging good attendance is well planned and effective. Transitions are carefully planned, including effective liaison with partner schools. Most students feel they have the right information and time for reflection to choose options in Key Stage 4, going into

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the sixth form, in local partner schools or into the world of work. The needs of all, including those who are looked after and the few from minority ethnic backgrounds, are met very well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a clear drive from a dedicated headteacher, respected by staff, students and parents alike, to improve all aspects of the school. Leadership has been notably successful in creating a school where students of all backgrounds feel happy and very well supported. Since the last inspection there has been a clear focus on improving teaching and learning that has resulted in improved standards. This has been coupled with improving intervention systems and a constantly evolving curriculum. These have ensured more even progress for all groups of students. However, the use of interim challenging targets is not yet fully embedded and this affects the rate at which all students are making progress. Systems and processes are in place to support accurate school self-evaluation but not all middle leaders have the appropriate skills set to deliver an honest and robust self-evaluation. The leadership group are aware where shortcomings exist and a comprehensive professional development programme is providing the right targeted improvement. The school's promotion of community cohesion and family support is outstanding and demonstrated by the sustainable partnerships that support the curriculum offer and have given confidence to many of the more vulnerable learners.

The promotion of respect and valuing others is at the heart of the school's ethos. The school fulfils all statutory duties in terms of equality and diversity. There is a very strong sense of its policies working through careful auditing. Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust and systematic in implementation. Risk assessments are detailed. Inspectors and students and parents have concerns about safety because of the proximity of a public right of way. The governing body is led well and is fully involved in holding the school leaders to account. They go the extra mile in helping the school engage with parents and the local community. The school community is both cohesive and harmonious. Very strong links with the local and wider community that the school serves and its constituents are making an exceptional contribution to cohesion. The satisfactory outcomes for students coupled with efficient resource allocation demonstrate satisfactory value for money.

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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
	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	1
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students enter the sixth form with broadly average attainment. Most make satisfactory progress and achieve standards that are broadly in line with the national average. In some subjects, including art, textiles, information and communication technology, health and social care, students make consistently good progress when compared to their prior attainment at GCSE. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but variable. Leaders have a clear idea of how the sixth form should develop and improve but they lack a real sense of drive or urgency in which to carry this out. Nevertheless, leaders are aware of the stronger and weaker areas of teaching. Some actions to improve weaker teaching have been moderately successful. The systems for tracking student progress are not coherent enough; they do not provide a sufficient overview of students' progress across all courses. This hinders the effectiveness of timely interventions to tackle underachievement.

Students enjoy their time in the sixth form. Attendance, punctuality and retention rates are good. They have positive attitudes to work and in most lessons demonstrate good levels of commitment to work and to making progress. Effective partnerships with local schools and colleges enables the school to offer a wide range of options, including vocational courses and diplomas. Students are unanimous in their judgement that they get the right guidance at all stages of their post-16 education. Care, guidance and support are as strong a feature in the sixth form as in the main school, with all students well prepared for the challenges they meet on leaving the sixth form.

Students make a good contribution to a strong sixth form community through their

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commitments to clubs, involvement in local politics and active participation on the student council. A significant minority are involved at an international level through their links with South Africa. The extent to which students increase their employability is a strength. Students cite the effective impact of curricular and work experience programmes, combined with good levels of self-confidence and personal development. Students develop well the skills which will enable them to make progress in life beyond school.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The parents of nearly one sixth of the school population responded to the Ofsted questionnaire. Their responses show very high levels of satisfaction with the work of the school. The majority of the small numbers of parental criticisms were offered constructively, focusing on issues with individuals rather than the school as a whole. Parents responded particularly strongly on the impact of the curriculum in preparing young people for their futures and happiness with their offspring's experience of school. A majority of those writing to inspectors indicated how 'impressed' they are 'with the welcome and supportive nature of all the staff'. 'I have always found the school will listen and take the students and parents' views into account'. The quality of care also found favour with parents. A small but significant number of criticisms were about the fact that the 'public can use the walk path that goes right through the middle of the school'. Inspectors share this concern and as a consequence have graded safeguarding as satisfactory, despite some very strong elements in the school's provision. The school has taken all reasonable steps to minimise the inherent risks posed by such an arrangement and the matter is being dealt with by a consultant for the local authority.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ridgeway 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 182 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1250 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	81	45	95	52	7	4	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	65	36	106	58	11	6	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	85	47	79	43	12	7	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	77	42	83	46	11	6	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	68	37	99	54	4	2	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	34	95	52	14	8	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	47	26	113	62	15	8	2	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)	78	43	79	43	12	7	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	71	39	92	51	8	4	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	55	30	97	53	13	7	6	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	54	30	89	49	11	6	4	2
The school is led and managed effectively	84	46	83	46	4	2	4	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	94	52	78	43	7	4	4	2

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

	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:	<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.



9 October 2009

Dear Student

Inspection of Ridgeway School, Plympton, PL7 2RS

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons, meeting with you, and were particularly impressed by your behaviour around the school and in lessons.

These are the main points we liked about your school.

- The headteacher, staff and governors are passionate about providing you with a tremendous range and variety of educational experiences that equip you well for your futures.
- The care, guidance and support you receive are fantastic and help you develop as well-rounded people who behave well and value the relationships with teachers and each other.
- You are enthusiastic about your opportunities to take part in school clubs and local community and international events.
- We agree with the headteacher and senior team that most of the teaching is good and this is helping you make progress and gain qualifications.

The inspection team and the headteacher agree that although your school has made the progress expected since we last visited there is still plenty to do and we have asked that the school's leaders ensure that:

- more of you make faster progress by asking harder questions and checking more regularly that you have understood
- leaders at all levels are more rigorous in the ways they use information to track your progress

You can do your part to help by ensuring that you always work hard. The team joins me in sending you best wishes for your studies and we hope that you all do very well in the future.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Palk

Her Majesty's Inspector

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