

Ridgeway High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105097
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	362132
Inspection dates	24–25 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Sue Harrison HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	707
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Reynolds
Headteacher	Ms P Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 32 lessons taught by 35 teachers, and held meetings with groups of students, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, scrutinised students' books and looked at documentation, including progress tracking systems, the school's development plan and parental questionnaires.

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

- the robustness of the school's self-evaluation
- the reasons for improvements in examination results in recent years and how sustainable they are
- the effectiveness of measures to ensure all groups of students achieve equally well.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average secondary school with a greater proportion of boys than girls. Most students are from White British backgrounds and very few have English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average. The school gained specialist status in business and enterprise in 2004 and a second specialism in modern foreign languages in 2008. It shares a site with a City Learning Centre and a community library. The school has won a number of local and national awards.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Ridgeway is an outstanding school because of the extent to which it meets the needs of individual students. Many of the parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire commented on the school 'getting the best out of my child' and 'going the extra mile' to help them succeed.

Teachers are very skilful at getting students interested in lessons and use an extensive range of teaching methods to help them to learn. Parents and carers spoke of how well teachers relate to students and instil a belief that they can succeed. Teaching provides an excellent balance of high expectations and very well planned lessons. The quality of care, guidance and support for students is exceptional. The extensive level of pastoral support is very much appreciated by students and their families. Equally strong is the additional academic support outside lessons. The school is innovative at finding ways to help students to complete work to the best of their ability. The outstanding curriculum provides courses and methods of delivering learning that stimulate students' desire to learn. This includes an extensive and imaginative range of activities that students participate in outside lessons. All this creates a sense of belonging to the school which motivates students of all abilities.

The school provides a safe, calm and stimulating atmosphere. As a result of the excellent quality of provision, students thrive and achieve outstanding outcomes. The majority of students thoroughly enjoy school, they attend well and their behaviour is good. Students enter the school with levels of literacy that are well below average. They make excellent progress overall and good progress in the core subjects of English and mathematics. As a result, levels of attainment are above average by the end of Year 11. A small number of high ability students are not reaching their full potential. Students develop an excellent range of skills to help them when they leave school and make an outstanding contribution to the school and the local community.

Since the last inspection, the leadership team has brought about significant improvement in examination results. It has also improved attendance, reduced persistent absence and improved standards of behaviour. Systems to track and monitor students' performance are excellent. Managers encourage staff to find innovative ways to help students succeed and there is a real 'can do' ethos in the school. Promotion of equality of opportunity and commitment to the local community are both outstanding. Partnership work and relationships with parents and carers are highly effective. There have been shortcomings in financial management which are now being tackled. The governing body offers a high level of support to the school. However, until recently it did not receive sufficiently robust management information. This has been rectified and members of the governing body are beginning to provide an increased level of

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challenge. Self-evaluation is thorough and honest and the school has good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve attainment by helping students to make the same level of progress in English and mathematics as they do in many other subjects, and by increasing the proportion of high grades achieved by the most able students.
- Ensure that members of the governing body are equipped through appropriate training to monitor all aspects of the school, and in particular to ensure the school maintains high standards during the period of budget adjustment.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

In lessons, the majority of students are very keen to learn and succeed. They try hard to complete work to the best of their ability and display a genuine thirst for knowledge, often asking questions that show they are listening well and want to know more. As they move through the school, they make excellent progress in terms of learning how to study and organise their work. Students enjoy thinking for themselves and become increasingly confident at researching information. Many are able to work independently when not closely supervised. Students participate extensively in activities outside lessons. They willingly take on positions of responsibility, for which they often have to apply and demonstrate why they are the best candidate for the post. Students have a real say in how their school is run. They take the initiative in researching aspects they are interested in, often making links with external agencies and then presenting their findings to the headteacher. Their participation in extra activities is excellent and students willingly set up and run their own clubs alongside those offered by the school. Students work very well together in teams and show respect for the views of others. They have a good understanding of a wide range of cultures. They care about other people and contribute to the local community in numerous ways. Students work extensively with local primary schools, give practical help to families in need and organisations such as the local hospice, and run environmental projects. A high proportion of students engage in fitness activities and respond very positively to other healthy living initiatives. An increasing proportion of students choose healthy food options.

Students feel very safe and thoroughly enjoy coming to school. As a result, the majority of students attend regularly and behaviour is good. They make excellent progress overall against their starting points on entering the school and good progress in the core subjects of English and mathematics. A small number of the most able students do not reach their full potential and the school is taking action to address this. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve very well at the school. There is a rising trend in examination results. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE's at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, has risen significantly each year since 2007. Inspectors saw evidence in students' coursework, classwork and results

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from early entries for examinations that the school is well placed to exceed its challenging targets for 2010 which are well above the national average. An impressive amount of students gain qualifications in modern foreign languages.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

A high proportion of teaching is good or outstanding. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They plan lessons meticulously to ensure high levels of motivation and interest. Teachers set high standards in terms of behaviour and work ethic and help students develop the confidence to succeed. Most students are crystal clear about what is expected of them in lessons. Teachers achieve this by involving every individual in the class and by using a range of teaching techniques suited to the particular group. The majority of teachers use questions very skilfully to make students think hard and justify their answers. In a few classes, teachers move on too quickly and do not challenge sufficiently the more able students. Teachers use learning resources, and information and communication technology creatively and imaginatively to add interest to lessons and to help students grasp theoretical ideas. In one class, students watched two video

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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clips that provided excellent stimulus material for what makes a good debate before going on to plan their own debate, which they filmed and analysed. Assessment of students' work is used well to plan future lessons and homework is generally marked regularly with most teachers giving students clear guidance on what they can do to improve further. Teachers regularly get students to assess their own work and that of other students to help them understand what they are doing well and what they need to do to gain even higher marks. Teaching assistants are well deployed to help students with special educational needs and/or disabilities take a full part in lessons. Students themselves praise the teaching they receive. Typical comments are that most lessons are really interesting, that teachers will do everything to help them understand and that they are 'always there to help us do our best'.

The curriculum has been exceptionally well designed to meet students' individual needs and aspirations. In Key Stage 3, there is an emphasis on developing literacy skills, particularly as many students enter the school with literacy levels well below average. Themed topic work across a range of subjects provides students with exciting and memorable learning experiences. This promotes enjoyment of school from Year 7 and also develops study skills to help students in all subjects. Older students benefit from having a very wide choice of courses and qualifications. The school adopts a 'stage not age' approach to the curriculum and students enjoy the opportunity to take qualifications when they are ready for them, including GCE AS provision. The school has made excellent use of its business and enterprise status to offer vocational courses ranging from childcare to land based sciences. Links with local businesses play a very important part in providing experiences that help students to develop work-related skills. The 'Learning for Life' part of the curriculum is very well planned to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness in ways appropriate to each year group. This is achieved through regular timetabled slots, well planned assemblies and very successful use of themed days and events. Regular, intensive study days develop team building, financial awareness and creative skills. Students feel there is always something interesting going on at the school and that learning is well linked to the world outside the classroom. Enrichment activities are extensive and contribute hugely to students' enjoyment, maturity and confidence. The school listens well to the views of students and monitors participation in activities to ensure there is something for everyone. Current activities range from the 'Glee' club to Mandarin Chinese! The modern foreign language specialism has had a major impact in the school. All students study a language and older students help to deliver Spanish and French sessions in primary schools. Opportunities to contribute to the local community are widespread across the curriculum.

Students receive exceptional levels of pastoral support. Each year group is monitored and supported by a non-teaching head of year, who stays with their students throughout their time at the school. Liaison with parents and carers and with external agencies is excellent. The on-site health clinic makes a significant contribution to the health and well-being of the students. There is outstanding support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure they participate fully in class and

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in out of school activities. Excellent training takes place for staff and students to raise awareness of particular conditions, such as autism, and an innovative transition toolkit helps these students to settle into secondary school. Transition arrangements for all students are excellent. Students' progress is monitored very carefully and exceptional support for learning takes place through booster classes, intensive study days after school, holiday sessions and residential. These are very popular with students, with impressive numbers attending Friday evening sessions that students say are fun as well as helping them with their work. Students receive very effective guidance to help them make choices on courses and their future careers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
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?

Since the last inspection, the leadership team has brought about a significant rise in the proportion of students gaining five GCSE's at grades A*-C including English and mathematics. The rise has been three times the rate of increase nationally and the school is on track to make a further significant rise in 2010. The school has also improved attendance, reduced persistent absence and improved standards of behaviour. These improvements have been brought about as a result of the high ambition and strong sense of purpose communicated by the headteacher and other senior leaders, and shared by staff. The ethos of the school demonstrates a very high level of commitment to students and the local community. Systems of target setting and of tracking student progress are exceptionally thorough and provide frequent reports on progress to staff, students and their parents or carers. Plans to tackle underachievement are prompt and precisely focused on the needs of individuals, and the impact of actions is reviewed frequently. The school has a rigorous system of lesson observation which is used effectively to share good practice and improve aspects of weaker practice. Staff are encouraged to develop new ideas which contribute to the positive 'can do' ethos of the school.

There have been shortcomings in financial management leading to a deficit situation. The senior team has identified and rectified these shortcomings and has a realistic plan for reducing the deficit. The governing body provides strong support but previously lacked robust management information. It is now receiving accurate reports and has begun to develop its capacity for asking challenging questions. Given the recent financial situation, value for money cannot be judged better than satisfactory. Members of the

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governing body have a clear understanding of their statutory duties regarding safeguarding and systems in the school are good.

Partnership work is extensive and is a major factor contributing to the school's excellent curriculum and support services. The school has a very positive relationship with parents and carers. They are exceptionally well informed about their children's progress. They have very good opportunities to discuss the progress of the child, especially when a student is facing any difficulties. Parents participate in many school events.

The school has an exceptional commitment to providing equality of opportunity which is demonstrated in extensive provision to meet the needs of all students and the high levels of support in place to help them succeed. The monitoring of different groups is carried out in great detail. The school is excellent at promoting harmony among different groups of students and in helping them to understand and respect other cultures. It makes an outstanding contribution to its local community and is developing successful links in this country and abroad to broaden the experience of students.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaire are very positive about the school. Comments on inspection questionnaires described it as 'fantastic'. They are particularly pleased about the safe and caring environment of the school and how well staff relate to the needs of their children. They are very positive about the quality of teaching and the progress being made by their child. As well as academic progress, parents and carers commented on the personal development of the

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children. "My child has the opportunity to participate in activities which have enabled him to grow as a young adult and respect others' was one comment.

At the time of the inspection Year 11 students had completed their examinations and were not present in the school. As a result, the questionnaire was not distributed to parents and carers of that cohort.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ridgeway High 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 270 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 707 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	106	39	148	55	14	5	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	145	54	116	43	7	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	154	57	106	39	10	4	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	117	43	140	52	8	3	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	123	46	141	52	3	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	103	38	143	53	19	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	68	25	171	63	23	9	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)	104	39	149	55	6	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	113	42	144	53	9	3	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	112	41	136	50	18	7	1	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	86	32	165	61	9	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	133	49	127	47	6	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	154	57	104	39	7	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



28 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Ridgeway High School, Prenton, CH43 9EB

As you know we recently inspected your school and I am writing to tell you about our findings. Thank you for helping us to find our way around and telling us your views.

We think Ridgeway is an outstanding school. We were very impressed by how hard you and your teachers work to get the very best out of each individual student. We thought that a lot of the teaching was very good and that the majority of you participate in lessons really well and show how keen you are to succeed. We agree with what many of you told us that staff care about the students and that you receive an outstanding amount of extra support and guidance. It was really good to see how many of you attend extra sessions to help with your work. Attendance at lessons has improved and is good. Most students behave well and show respect for other people. It was good to see how much you contribute to the life of the school and to your local community. The excellent curriculum helps you to develop a very good range of skills that will help you when you leave school. Your achievement in examinations has improved significantly in recent years and we think you make excellent progress in many subjects. Progress in English and mathematics is improving and is now good. A few students could do even better in some subjects.

We think the school is very well managed. The headteacher and the rest of the staff keep a close check on how well you are doing and provide lots of extra activities to help you enjoy school. In order to keep up improvements, we have asked the school to:

- further improve levels of attainment by helping you to make the same level of progress in English and mathematics as you do in many other subjects, and by increasing the proportion of high grades achieved by the most able students
- strengthen the role of the governing body in monitoring the work of the school.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all the best for the future and well done!

Yours sincerely

Mrs Sue Harrison

Her Majesty's Inspector

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