

Rainham School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118823
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	326901
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	1565
Sixth form	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Miss S Mann
Headteacher	Mrs J Dunn
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 May 2006
School address	Derwent Way Rainham Gillingham Kent ME8 0BX
Telephone number	01634 362746
Fax number	01634 388334

Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	13–14 May 2008
Inspection number	326901

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than most secondary schools, and is a non-selective school in a selective area. It has been a specialist college for technology since 1996. Most students are from White British backgrounds and the remainder come from a range of other heritages. A higher proportion of students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although fewer students than average have a statement of special educational needs.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. It is an improving school and several aspects of its work are good. Students enjoy school, and the good care, guidance and support they receive from staff ensure that they benefit a great deal from what the school provides. As a result, their personal development and well-being are good. This is reflected in their positive behaviour, the clear contribution they make to the school and wider community, and their good understanding of the need to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles. The good curriculum, with its varied pathways and progression routes, meets students' needs and aspirations well and prepares them effectively for their future lives. The inclusion of all students in the work and life of the school has high priority for the headteacher and her staff and is evident in the school's positive ethos. The school's partnership with others is excellent. Most parents are fully supportive of the school's work.

Standards are improving and are now closer to the national average than in previous years. The GCSE examination results in 2008 were below average but the school's tracking information shows that students are on course to do better this year, especially for the proportion attaining A* to C grades and when English and mathematics are included. The more frequent assessment and monitoring of students' progress is giving staff a clearer picture of where students are in relation to their challenging targets. It also enables additional support or other intervention strategies to be implemented at an early stage. Students' achievement is satisfactory, and shows an improvement over that seen in the GCSE examinations in 2008, when most groups underachieved. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because they receive effective support through the school's strong pastoral arrangements and from teaching assistants. Many students, especially the higher attainers, are capable of making faster progress, as seen in the more effective lessons where teaching and learning are good. At present, there is not enough good teaching to ensure students make consistently good progress and so reduce the variation in standards between GCSE subjects that still exists.

Senior staff monitor the quality of teaching and learning but their observations and subsequent judgements are sometimes too generous. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and not quite as strong as the school considers it to be. Although there are some undoubted strengths and examples of good practice, teachers do not routinely provide tasks and activities to challenge all students sufficiently, especially the higher attainers. Not all teachers ensure students' active engagement through working with others or do enough in the lesson to check on the learning that is taking place. Their marking of work does not consistently help students know what they need to do to improve it.

Senior leaders are focusing well on raising standards and improving students' achievement further. Many initiatives are proving to be successful, although they are not always tied closely enough together to ensure maximum impact. This applies particularly to strategies to improve teaching and learning and to monitor their effectiveness in order to inform subsequent action. Good leadership and management, and the effective progress made recently in raising standards, show that the school has good capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students gain much from the opportunities provided for them in the sixth form and overall its effectiveness is satisfactory. Standards remain below average but students make broadly satisfactory progress from their below average starting points.

Although the teaching has some good aspects, it is only satisfactory overall. Students receive insufficient feedback from their teachers on how to improve their work, and the monitoring of their progress in lessons is inconsistent. Students enjoy the sixth form and speak highly of the good care, support and guidance they receive from staff. Their personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, are good. They take on responsibilities willingly, and contribute well to school life and to the local community. Their attendance is satisfactory but staff do not always monitor or follow up absences rigorously enough.

The inclusion of all students is central to the teaching and is effective in removing barriers. The good curriculum provides students with a wide range of courses, both academic and vocational, that meet their needs and aspirations well. Close links with other secondary schools extend the opportunities available to them. Students are prepared well for their future lives through good careers advice and guidance and the wider opportunities provided by the school. However, subject teachers place insufficient emphasis on developing students' skills of working independently. Good leadership of the sixth form is clearly focused on raising students' achievement beyond its current satisfactory level. New monitoring systems, including the sharper tracking of students' progress, have been introduced, but not all staff apply these rigorously to ensure consistency of approach across the sixth form as a whole.

What the school should do to improve further

- reduce the variations in subject performance in GCSE examinations and provide students, especially the higher attainers, with greater challenges to accelerate their progress
- involve students actively in working with others, check their progress systematically in lessons, and ensure that marking consistently helps them to improve their work
- sharpen the school's monitoring systems to judge the impact of initiatives more effectively and accurately in order to inform subsequent action.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards by Year 9, Year 11 and Year 13 have been below average for the last three years but have improved each year since 2006. This is reflected in the school's test and examination results, which were below average in 2008. The school's tracking information shows that standards are set to rise considerably again this year on most measures. These include students' best eight subjects, the proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades and those gaining these higher grades including

English and mathematics. This is likely to bring the school's performance close to the national average. The results in some of the weaker subjects in 2008, for example in science, geography, dance and physical education, are projected to improve this year. However, undue variations continue to exist in the performance of different subjects.

Students are making better progress between Year 7 and Year 11 than seen in previous years. The underachievement of several groups during the past three years has been rectified. Students' work and their learning in lessons show that their progress is now satisfactory. This has come about through more frequent assessments of their progress, and actions to support those students who are in danger of underachieving. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because their needs are identified early and they receive effective support, especially through the pastoral arrangements. Although the higher attaining students make satisfactory progress overall, they are not always challenged enough in lessons through additional extension activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy school and respond positively to its caring and supportive ethos. This is shown in their good attitudes and the positive relationships they have with one another and with staff. Students focus well when given the opportunity to work independently. Attendance has improved slightly because of the school's strategies, but remains broadly average. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, including their awareness of cultural diversity. For example, their selection of the names of minority ethnic women for four out of the school's five 'houses' shows a good appreciation of the contribution made by people of all cultures to society at large. Their positive behaviour in lessons, assemblies and around the school demonstrates a shared sense of purpose, values and cohesiveness. Students say they feel safe in school. They do not perceive bullying as a particular issue, and are confident that staff will tackle any incidents swiftly. A few parents expressed concerns about incidents of bullying and poor behaviour, especially when lessons are covered by a temporary teacher, but inspectors saw no evidence of any during the inspection.

Students have a good understanding of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle, as shown in their good levels of participation in extra-curricular clubs. However, not all adopt healthy choices at lunchtimes. In addition to their satisfactory literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills, students are prepared well for their future lives through enterprise and work-related activities and the curriculum as a whole. Through the range of responsibilities they undertake in the school and other activities, including fundraising for charities, students make a strong contribution to the school and to the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Although teaching has some good features, overall its quality is only satisfactory because the strong elements seen in the more effective lessons are not used consistently by all staff. These include the matching of work carefully to the full range of abilities in the class, the regular checking of the learning that is taking place and the use of a variety of teaching and learning approaches to motivate and enthuse students. Typically, most teachers plan their lessons carefully, ensuring that the objectives for each lesson, which they share with the students, are clear. They manage students' behaviour effectively and ensure that they remain focused on the activities planned for the lesson. Relationships are generally positive, as are students' attitudes to learning. Where lessons are satisfactory rather than good, some of the approaches used tend to limit the progress students make. For example, some tasks and activities do not always engage students' interest or challenge them sufficiently, especially the higher attainers. At times, an over-reliance on working from textbooks and rather lengthy inputs from teachers reduce the opportunities for students to share and rehearse learning with others in pairs or small groups. Some teachers do not do enough to check the learning that is taking place during the lesson in order to inform the next stage.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets students' aspirations and interests well and takes account of local needs and employment. The school's technology status is making a strong contribution to the breadth of the curriculum and in extending the use of technology to support teaching and learning. Clear pathways and progression routes allow students to follow a wide variety of academic, vocational and modular courses appropriate to their needs. The curriculum in Year 7 builds effectively on earlier primary school experiences and helps students to develop a wide range of attributes, for example problem-solving, team-working and confidence-building skills. These have the potential to stand them in good stead during their time in school and in their future lives. The opportunity to start units of work for some GCSE courses in Years 8 and 9 is having a positive impact on students' motivation. The provision for personal, social and health education, including citizenship, makes a strong contribution to students' personal development. Enterprise activities, work experience and work-related learning make an effective contribution to their future economic well-being. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities, including opportunities for additional study support, enhance students' academic and personal development. Students enjoy these but comment that they would like more, especially for those in Years 7 and 8.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff are strongly committed to developing positive relationships with students and provide them with good care, guidance and support. As a result, students feel secure, knowing that any concerns they have will be dealt with promptly and effectively. As one student succinctly said: 'Teachers help you go down the right path rather than the wrong path.' A strong network of staff across the school ensures that

the level of pastoral support is excellent. This is particularly evident in the quality of support provided for potentially vulnerable students, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Thorough systems are used effectively to monitor and review students' attendance and their behaviour. The work of specialist staff in the school and the school's excellent liaison with a range of external support agencies ensure additional support to enhance students' well-being. Safeguarding procedures, including child protection and health and safety arrangements, meet requirements.

Students' academic progress is checked regularly and this information is being used effectively. Although the systems are still being sharpened, they enable senior and middle leaders to identify students in danger of underachieving and to ensure that appropriate support is provided in good time. Students know their targets, and the system of academic review sheets clearly shows them, and their parents, their progress towards meeting these. There is some excellent practice in the marking of students' work, for example in English and mathematics. Overall, however, the guidance they receive from subject teachers on how to improve their work or reach the next level or grade is inconsistent and insufficiently diagnostic.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and other senior leaders are committed to ensuring all students benefit from the school's provision and have the best possible chance to do as well as they can. They have recognised the need to improve standards and students' achievement further and have implemented successfully several initiatives in areas of the school's work to make sure that this happens. The regular tracking of students' progress and sharper monitoring systems ensure that students are making faster progress this year, resulting in higher standards. Middle leaders are playing a much stronger role in seeking improvements in their areas of responsibility. Some initiatives, for example the faculty structure, its training school status, the effective professional development programme and the seeking of external quality marks, have strengthened the quality of provision. However, they have not been brought together well enough as a coherent whole to have maximum impact on raising standards and achievement further.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The priorities in the most recent school improvement plan are focused much more closely on improving students' achievement and provide a clear agenda for the coming months. The school has a good understanding of its own community and of the local area. The impact of this engagement and its links with a number of schools abroad ensure that the school promotes community cohesion well. Governors are fully involved in the life of the school and make a valuable contribution to its work. The governing body meets its responsibilities satisfactorily but has not done enough to hold the school to account for its performance, especially in raising standards and achievement further.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16–19
---	-----------------------	--------------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B

15 May 2009



Dear Students

Inspection of Rainham School for Girls, Gillingham ME8 0BX

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit to your school. We very much enjoyed seeing all that you were doing and joining you in your lessons. The discussions we had with many of you were really helpful in giving us a greater understanding of the school. This letter is to tell you of our findings. I hope that many of you will read the full report.

The school provides you with a satisfactory education. Most of you are making satisfactory progress in your learning and attaining standards that are closer to the national average than they have been for the past three years. However, we think that some of you could do even better than you currently do. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Some lessons are good and where this occurs, you make good progress. However, you need more good teaching if you are to make faster progress over time.

You tell us that you enjoy school and that there are always staff you can turn to if you have a problem. We think that staff give you high standards of care, support and guidance, especially if you find learning or school life difficult. The curriculum meets your needs well and gives you plenty of opportunities to follow your particular interests. You behave well and have a good understanding of the need to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. You make a good contribution to school life and that of the local community.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They are committed to raising standards further and to ensuring that you all do as well as you possibly can. We have asked them to do three things to improve the school's work. You can help by always doing your very best.

- Reduce the differences in the GCSE results in some subjects and provide you with more challenging work to help you make faster progress, especially if you are quick to learn.
- Ensure all teachers give you more opportunities to work with others in lessons, check your progress systematically and in their marking give you more guidance on how you can improve your work.
- Sharpen the school's systems for checking its work, especially the impact of any new initiatives, in order to inform any subsequent action that it needs to take.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Joan Greenfield
Lead inspector