

Ratton School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114606
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	338416
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Alan Taylor-Bennett HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Lindsey
Headteacher	David Linsell
Date of previous school inspection	20–21 March 2007
School address	Park Avenue Eastbourne East Sussex BN21 2XR
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Forty-two lessons and 42 teachers were observed. In addition, meetings were held with governors, local authority representatives, staff and groups of students. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's development plan, its self-review, analyses of the attainment and progress of its students, records of lesson observations, policies, and 134 parental questionnaires.

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

- the impact on the achievement of students of the school's emphasis on the uses of assessment in teaching and learning
- the effectiveness of the provision to manage attendance
- how well the school is improving the degree of community cohesion in its locality and the extent to which it evaluates its impact.

Information about the school

Ratton School is a slightly larger-than-average school, drawing students from all over Eastbourne. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is small and the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average. The school is a performing arts specialist college, and it holds the Artsmark Gold, and the Healthy Schools and International School awards. The school has long-standing curriculum links with other local schools and colleges in the area. At the time of the inspection the headteacher was on secondment to the Department for Education, the acting headteacher who had taken responsibility for the leadership of the school was ill and in her absence the school was being led by the acting deputy headteacher.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Ratton School is providing a good quality education for its students.

- Students' achievement is good, having improved over recent years. A major factor in this improvement is the close monitoring of students' attainment and progress, and the use of this information to plan intervention and support using a very wide range of strategies. This good progress is improving attainment.
- The school is well led. Senior staff and middle leaders show passion to secure the best outcomes for students, and compassion in supporting those who are vulnerable or have additional needs.
- Students' progress in mathematics, although satisfactory, is less secure than in other areas because the teaching is not sufficiently well matched to the learning needs of students.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school; students look after each other well and support each other's learning effectively.
- Students demonstrate a range of learning skills but their capacity for independent learning is not well developed.
- Students' contributions to the school community and to the local, national and international communities are outstanding. A significant proportion, representing all groups in the school, take on positions of responsibility and leadership very successfully.
- The good outcomes for students are a result of the good quality care, guidance and support provided by the school.
- There are good systems to provide information about students' progress. This information is used by many teachers to plan lessons and choose resources appropriate to learning needs.
- As a consequence, teaching is good and improving because of the steps being taken by senior staff. However, the rate of improvement is not consistent across departments and current strategies do not have the capacity to improve the proportion of teaching that is outstanding.
- The school's use of its specialism is impressive. Performing arts status makes important contributions to developing the quality of teaching and improving curricular provision, and it enriches the experiences of students and the local community.
- The curriculum provides a wide range of appropriate opportunities to enable all students to enjoy their learning and acquire good qualifications. There is a wide range of good quality extra-curricular provision.
- Attendance is now good. It has improved over recent years as a direct result of

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- specific actions taken by the school. Students are punctual to lessons.
- Community cohesion is outstanding. The school has a very good understanding of the needs of its local community and responds across a number of fronts to secure improvement in its coherence, using its specialism imaginatively. These actions are evaluated thoroughly and the information gleaned is used to drive further improvements.
 - The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good. The school has a strong track record of driving up the quality of outcomes for young people because of well-targeted improvements to provision. The quality of self-evaluation is very good because it is accurate and thorough. Priorities are used to inspire, challenge and motivate staff and provide coherence to all of the school's systems.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in all areas of the school by 2012, by
 - identifying how the best teaching in the school can help to raise the quality of satisfactory classroom practice
 - disseminating across the whole school the very good use of assessment information to motivate good teaching and learning seen in some classrooms
 - establishing a clear strategy to develop more outstanding teaching.
- Improve the attainment of students at the end of Year 11 by 2012 to levels that are consistently above the national average, by
 - ensuring an appropriately high level of challenge to students in all lessons
 - developing strategies to enable them to develop more confidence as independent and reflective learners.
- Improve students' achievement in mathematics, by
 - systematically setting and using performance targets
 - giving good quality feedback that enables them to understand what to do to improve the quality of their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Over recent years, students have attained examination outcomes at Key Stage 4 that are close to the national average. However, the school is improving the ways in which it uses assessment information and it is developing the curriculum in some exciting ways; for example, the 'Opening Minds' course now gives students a good understanding of how to learn effectively and enjoyably. These changes are causing a wave of better student progress to travel through the school, which has resulted in a good quality of learning in all year groups, improved attainment and good achievement overall. Many lessons involve active and engaging learning methods. In one English lesson observed, students enjoyed responding competitively to a series of questions by moving to different parts of the classroom. These improvements are more securely embedded in some subject areas than others. For example, progress

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in mathematics is still satisfactory because strategies to use assessment information to target improvement are less well developed and, as a result, students’ written work is often untidy and their learning insecure. The progress of all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is good because the school is highly inclusive. It offers alternative methods of achieving in the curriculum based on using assessments to target good quality interventions, often involving support staff.

Behaviour around the school is usually good and students encourage each other to conduct themselves well. Incidents of racial abuse and bullying are closely monitored and are now relatively rare, and the number of exclusions has decreased steadily in recent years. Students maintain a well-tuned perspective on their own safety and that of others. They are entirely confident that issues they raise will be dealt with promptly and effectively by staff.

Students show a good knowledge and understanding of the factors affecting their physical and mental health and emotional well-being. Many, including those most at risk, have already taken action to improve their health and well-being by, for example, taking up dance, sport and musical activities.

The extent and the quality of students’ contribution to school and the wider community are outstanding. The mixed-age tutor groups give opportunity for students of all ages to take responsibility for looking after others. The school council enables students to contribute to decisions made about life in school and the wider community. Students are involved in charity work in local, national and international contexts, raising significant amounts of money each year. The school’s specialism in performing arts has been a driving force in developing students’ capacity and enthusiasm to contribute to their community; there is a very strong tradition of high quality productions and considerable enthusiasm to take part in them.

Students are well prepared to move between various stages of school and for their next steps. Very few are not in education, employment or training after leaving the school. They are aspirational, know precisely what they need to do and are determined to succeed. Students also think deeply about their own and others’ experiences and try to relate them to a clear set of personal values. They show a very good insight, based on first-hand experience, into similarities and differences between their own and other cultures, through links with Austria, Japan and other countries. In one assembly, they reflected deeply on their own standpoints in relation to the difficulties faced by others in times of change. Many are open to new ideas and appreciate cultural diversity.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
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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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Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Students are well cared for and supported by the school. For example, arrangements to ensure that the move from primary school into Year 7 is happy and successful are very effective. The quality of information about the range of Key Stage 4 courses available to students, and how each pathway suits the needs of individuals, is good, and the transition from Year 11 to further education is well planned. Provision for students with learning and other needs is systematic and responsive. For example, the Turnaround Centre supports the confidence of more vulnerable individuals very effectively through a range of specialist provision. The school has been successful in improving levels of attendance significantly over recent years and attendance is now good. Liaison with external support agencies is good, and this is undertaken efficiently to offer prompt and effective support to students and their families when it is needed.

Teaching is good because most lessons begin with a clear explanation of the learning expected and how activities will promote good progress. Teaching is often energetic and stimulating, and students are actively involved. For example, in a dance lesson, students took a highly disciplined approach to acquiring an understanding of a British choreographer's work and made outstanding progress because of the high level of challenge and support from the teacher, and their willingness to work as a team. Teachers have good subject knowledge and can bring a topic to life by relating it to students' own experiences, and by taking their views into account. Assessment is used well in lessons and the school's considerable investment into this as its primary strategy to improve the quality of teaching and learning has paid dividends. Some departments are using assessment in classrooms very well; others are at an early stage of development. In the latter case, this results in insufficient challenge and some unsettled behaviour on the part of some students. Although the quality of the feedback offered to students in marking is generally good, it is not yet consistent across the school. At its best, it is particularly effective because it enables them to

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understand the reasons for their successes and to plan how to improve their work.

The curriculum meets the needs of learners well at both key stages, and there is evidence of its positive impact on students’ achievements. Clear routes towards a range of qualifications that provide well for the needs of all students begin in Year 9 or Year 10 as appropriate, and there is flexible provision for different groups, for example those with particular gifts or talents. Students are appreciative of this provision. The rate at which various subjects are developing their respective curriculum offerings is uneven, however. The school’s specialism has had a very positive influence on curriculum design, for example through the ‘change’ projects and the development of the creative and media Diploma. There are strong multicultural aspects, including Bollywood dance, and a tradition of choosing productions that develop an understanding of different cultures and provide stimulus to the exploration of such issues in school and in the local community.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership provided by the headteacher and his team is strong, purposeful and focused on improving outcomes for all students. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and development needs of the school and self-evaluation is thorough and purposeful in that it builds on strengths and identifies priorities for improvement accurately. The governing body provides support and challenge to the school’s leadership, and does so by drawing on the broad-ranging expertise and experience of its members, and by working with the school very closely. For example, during the headteacher’s secondment a useful set of specific medium term objectives were established by the acting headteacher and the governors to maintain the momentum of previous developments and address more immediate needs such as improving outcomes at Key Stage 4. Governors ensure that statutory requirements, such as the need to safeguard young people, are met well; the awareness staff and students have of safeguarding issues is good and all training is up-to-date.

Good lines of accountability are focused on the quality of outcomes for learners. Work to improve the quality of teaching has virtually eradicated any inadequate teaching in the school and it has improved much that was satisfactory to good. There are indications that the school’s judgements of the quality of teaching are sometimes optimistic, particularly when the teaching is responding to the school’s priorities well

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but not with sufficient coherence to result in good learning.

The school values the views of parents and carers and it responds to feedback that suggests that specific changes would improve provision, for example in the reorganisation of the reporting schedule. The governing body is particularly active in securing the engagement of a group of parents and carers in supporting the progress of their children. Sometimes, however, the response rate to parental surveys is disappointing. Partnership work with other schools and colleges has a strong impact on the quality of the curriculum and there are very good systems in place to support students’ achievement in the different venues. The school’s promotion of community cohesion is outstanding due to its good planning, and the energetic and imaginative use of its specialism.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The number of parental questionnaires returned was quite low. However, the very large majority of parents and carers who responded expressed happiness with the quality of their child’s experiences and expressed pleasure at how much their child enjoys school. Particular strengths are parents and carers feeling that their child is safe at school, and making progress. Parents and carers feel, for the most part, that teaching is good and that the school is well led. The areas of concern raised in the comments section by a few parents and carers did not tend to form a pattern or trend and inspectors’ judgements were very much in accord with this overall positive picture.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ratton 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 134 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1208 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	47	35	77	57	6	4	4	3
The school keeps my child safe	45	34	85	63	1	1	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	50	37	67	50	13	10	3	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	55	41	65	49	10	7	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	46	34	81	60	4	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	33	25	69	51	22	16	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	19	89	66	12	9	3	2
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)	39	29	76	57	6	4	1	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	37	28	79	59	9	7	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	33	25	70	52	16	12	5	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	21	70	52	15	11	5	4
The school is led and managed effectively	41	31	79	59	7	5	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	58	43	66	49	5	4	5	4

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 all 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 pupils' 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 May 2010

Dear Students



Inspection of Ratton School, Eastbourne, BN21 2XR

Thank you for the welcome you showed the inspection team when we visited recently. It was a pleasure to meet you and to learn about your school. We judged that your school is providing a good quality education for you. You can read the full report on the Ofsted website for yourself, but I have provided a summary of the main findings below.

The quality and extent of your contributions to the school community and to the community beyond the school are outstanding. The performing arts specialism gives you a wide range of opportunities to do this, as well as driving a lot of other improvements in the school. Your willingness to take part and make a difference also helps to secure an outstanding degree of community coherence which results in people working together harmoniously. Your good behaviour in lessons and around the site helps everyone to learn and to feel safe and happy in school. Teaching is good and senior staff have been successful at making this better over recent years. The curriculum is also good and many of you wanted us to know that you were appreciative of the opportunities presented to you. You are cared for well and those of you who have difficulties, or barriers to learning, are supported with care and thoughtfulness.

The senior staff and governors are leading your school well. They want to carry on making things even better for you and see you achieve even more. To help them to do this, I have asked that they respond to three areas for further improvement:

- improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in all areas of the school
- improve the attainment of students at the end of Year 11 to levels that are consistently above the national average
- improve students' achievement in mathematics.

If you read the full report, you will see that there are important ways in which you can contribute to these issues, and I hope that you will apply yourselves individually and collectively to achieving even better outcomes for the school and for yourselves.

I should like to extend my best wishes to you for your future happiness and success.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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