

Queensmead School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102443
Local Authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	308009
Inspection date	4 March 2008
Reporting inspector	John Kennedy HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1193
6th form	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Allan Walker
Headteacher	Mr Nigel McLaughlin
Date of previous school inspection	6 September 2004
School address	Queen's Walk Ruislip HA4 0LS
Telephone number	020 8845 6266
Fax number	020 8845 8331

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, particularly in English and science, aspects of teaching and learning, the effectiveness of care, guidance and support and aspects of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from observing parts of lessons, national published assessment data, the school's own records and other documentation, and observation of the school at work. Parents' questionnaires and discussions with staff, students, a local authority representative and the chair of governors also informed inspectors' judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Queensmead is an over-subscribed comprehensive school serving the local community of South Ruislip, with increasing numbers on roll from the neighbouring boroughs. The school serves an area where the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than average. There are higher proportions of boys than girls in most year groups, with the trend reversing in the sixth form. Most students are of White British origin. Over a quarter of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest proportion of whom are of Asian heritage. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, the largest number being those with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. However, the number of those in receipt of a statement of special educational needs is average. Attainment on entry is broadly average, although there has been a slight downward trend in recent years. The school has achieved National Healthy Schools status and the Artsmark silver award. It is designated as a specialist technology college and is the local authority's hub school for an extended school partnership of eight primary and five secondary schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Queensmead is an outstanding school that helps students to achieve well and develop into confident and mature learners. What makes the school outstanding are its exemplary leadership and management, rich curriculum and highly effective care, guidance and support. Coupled with good and improving teaching and learning, this results in students' outstanding personal development and their very good and improving progress. The impact of the school's technology status is pervasive and is evidenced in improvements made to the curriculum, staff development, the quality of teaching and learning and standards in subjects such as mathematics and design technology.

Students' develop well because of the exemplary pastoral care and support they receive. This is reflected in their positive attitudes to learning and the safe practices they adopt. The school encourages them to have a strong voice and responds well to their suggestions. This can be seen in the effective steps taken to help them lead healthy lifestyles, endorsed by recent Healthy School award. The students speak highly of the very good relationships within and between year groups, and this was evident during the inspection. Their outstanding personal development prepares them securely for the next stages of their lives. Students' enjoyment of school is underpinned by a curriculum which is outstanding in its breadth, balance and flexibility, and the growing range of extra-curricular and other enrichment opportunities on offer. Saturday schools are well attended and they boost students' achievement.

During their time at the school, students make very good progress and achieve standards which are well above average and in some subjects, such as mathematics, are exceptionally high. Good achievement is nurtured by high expectations, which are reinforced by good teaching and learning. Most students work hard and their exemplary behaviour contributes to their progress. Standards at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science are above average. However, English results are not where the school would like them to be, and teaching and learning in the department has been a focus for improvement. The progress that students make accelerates as they move through the school and results in GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, are well above average. Standards and achievement are showing an upward trend over time. The school has a secure understanding of current standards and achievement. Evidence indicates that the challenging targets set for 2008, which exceed 2007 performances, are realistic. External test results from this year indicate that, already, 60% of Year 11 students have achieved three or more GCSE or equivalent A*-C before the final examinations in June.

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that, overall, teaching and learning is good. Teachers know their students well and positive working relationships contribute well to learning. They make good use of information and communication technology to enhance learning. Classrooms are well-organised and purposeful learning environments. The best lessons are characterised by good classroom management, confident teaching and a range of well-planned activities to ensure that learning moves along briskly, with little time being lost. This helps students remain on task and make good progress. Excellent assessment systems mean that staff have a secure knowledge of all their students and their potential. They use this well to plan lessons, set challenging targets and monitor progress. Students, in turn, are clear about what they need to do to improve and they respond well to effective support if they are falling short of predicted grades. Marking is sometimes inconsistent but generally is informative in helping students know what they need to do to make progress. In some lessons, planning does not provide students with enough encouragement to be active and independent in their learning.

Exemplary care, guidance and support provide a firm foundation for the very good progress and exceptional personal development of students. This is reflected in one of many parental comments, 'I am particularly pleased with the help and guidance during exams and coursework. My daughter has never found school work easy and during this last year I have seen a mature young lady appear'. Safeguarding arrangements are secure and students know whom they can go to if they have concerns. Support is available to students in a wide range of ways and is particularly focussed on helping them to realise their potential. Staff volunteers, for example, act as assertive mentors, giving targeted students in Year 11 that extra bit of help and encouragement to do better. Sixth form students, as part of their community service, help younger students with their reading and homework. The staff manage behaviour well and, as a result, there are very low levels of exclusion. Attendance management systems are robust. Partnerships with other schools and support agencies enhance the support offered by the school. This can be seen, for example, in the partnership with the education welfare service in sustaining higher than average levels of attendance.

A significant factor in the school's improvement is the very good use made by staff of assessment and performance data to identify individual students' potential, and personalise target setting and tracking. This enables staff to provide prompt and effective support for students of all abilities if they show early signs of falling behind. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers because of the very good support they receive. The fact that all students achieve accreditation at the end of Year 11 is testament to the strong commitment the school gives to inclusion.

Most parents were positive in their view of the school. This was reflected in the parental questionnaire and the survey carried out by the school in May 2007. One parent typified the average response by commenting that, 'We have always been very impressed with the standard achieved by our children which was reached by the dedication, support and encouragement of all their teachers'. A small minority feels that the school does not communicate well enough with them and this has been recognised by the school as an area of development. A few expressed concerns about behaviour, but this was not apparent during the inspection.

The leadership and management provided by the headteacher and his colleagues are exemplary, and their expectations and aspirations equally so. Performance management systems are robust. Staff know what is expected of them and are held to account and recognised for the contribution they make to learning and continuous improvement. A striking feature of the leadership group and middle managers is their unwillingness to be complacent, and this is at the foundation of improving standards and achievement. They work as a cohesive group and are well supported by a good, and when required critical, governing body. Senior and middle leaders have secure knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, though at times they are modest in their judgements. For instance, they have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. Where the quality of teaching is below expectation they take effective steps to address any variability in the performance of subjects. Leaders are well focussed on achieving their aim of having all teaching at least good. Management of resources is very good and the school provides excellent value for money. Effective steps have been taken in improving accommodation since the last inspection. However, there are still shortcomings in the accommodation, in science for example, that inhibit achievement and standards. The track record of improvement in achievement and standards, and outstanding leadership and management, demonstrate the school's outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision for students in the very comprehensive sixth form is good as is shown by increasing numbers on roll. Standards vary at times between courses but, generally, students achieve well and reach standards that are above average. Students speak well of the good teaching they receive. The curriculum is as strong as the main school in many respects, particularly in its flexibility and breadth. However, religious education is a weaker feature of curriculum provision. Sixth form students are mature and confident learners who contribute well to the school community. Students get on very well with staff and enjoy their education. This is reflected in high retention rates. Attendance, however, is not as high as in the main school. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. However, the highly effective systems of tracking, monitoring and support present in the main school are not as yet as effective for these older students. The majority of sixth form students continue on to further education, with the remainder typically moving into employment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Create more opportunities in lessons for students to be more active and independent in their learning.
- Strengthen communication with parents.

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Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	2
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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 the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Queensmead School, Ruislip, HA4 0LS

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We were impressed with how well your school is run and the good work of your teachers in making sure that you do well. You attend an excellent school. While there are some differences in the quality of lessons, we agreed with your senior staff that, overall, teaching and learning are good. Some of you said that you would welcome more opportunities to work independently and participate more actively in lessons. We have asked your school to give this some priority.

One of the reasons your school is so good is that it provides you with a very wide range of curriculum options, including many after-school and lunchtime activities. Along with the usual range of clubs that we see in many schools, we also noticed activities such as archery and even war games! Some of you have the benefit of Saturday classes, which help those of you who want to do better in more academic subjects. The vast majority of your parents responded favourably to our questionnaire, although some said that the school could improve communication with them and we have asked the school to work on this.

Your behaviour was exemplary when we visited the school and we found that in general your attendance is very good. This is a reflection of how much you enjoy your learning and your determination to do well. The care, support and guidance provided by the staff at all levels are first-rate. What impressed us most was how well they know your strengths and potential. They do their best to check frequently on how well you are doing and, if they see that you could do better, they provide you with support and that extra push you might need to get your predicted grades.

Your results in external exams are very good in Key Stages 3 and in the sixth form. In most subjects, you reach above average standards. Results in GCSE exams are particularly impressive. Last year they were well above average and there is every indication that this will be repeated, or improved on this year. This is because of your excellent schooling, but also your own hard work. You can continue to help the school to be outstanding by making the most of the potential you have to do well. I wish you the very best for your futures.

John Kennedy

Her Majesty's Inspector