

The Robert Smyth School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120237
Local Authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	358724
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Martin Cragg HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1348
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	520
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Max Corney
Headteacher	Colin Dean
Date of previous school inspection	16 April 2008
School address	Burnmill Road Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 7JG
Telephone number	01858 440770
Fax number	01585 440771
Email address	office@robertsmyth.leics.sch.uk

Age group	14–19
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2010
Inspection number	358724

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 1234 234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 1234 234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 41 lessons and 41 teachers, and visited four other lessons briefly and ten tutor sessions. They held meetings with groups of students, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school improvement plan, school assessment data, policies and evidence of self-evaluation. They reviewed questionnaires returned by 214 parents and carers, 133 students and 88 staff.

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

- What is the rate of students' progress as reflected in provisional results for 2010, the school's current assessment information and observation of lessons?
- Do the school's specialist status, partnerships and the curriculum meet the needs of a wide range of students?
- What is the impact of leaders in evaluating performance and improving outcomes for students?
- What are the trends in achievement in the sixth form and is there any link to the quality of teaching?

Information about the school

The school is larger than the average secondary school. Most students are from White British backgrounds. Relatively few students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportions of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and with a statement of special educational needs are below average. The most common areas of need are moderate and specific learning difficulties.

The school has joint specialist technology status with two local high schools. It has achieved Healthy Schools status and the Basic Skills Quality Mark among other accolades.

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

This is a good school. It is a harmonious community and provides a good education for students. All students are valued and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make the strongest progress in the school. Outcomes for students are good and they feel exceptionally safe in the school. Their attendance is above average. They mix well, encouraged by the vertical tutor groups containing students from all years. Behaviour is good around the school and in lessons. Students are supported well and those with specific needs benefit from very good care and guidance. There are very helpful links with the local community, schools and colleges.

Students' attainment by the end of Year 11 is consistently above the national average, especially in science, one of the school's specialist subjects. Students make good progress from their starting points, although there is some variation across the wide range of subjects offered. The school has a rigorous system for setting challenging targets and for tracking students' progress. Detailed analysis of this information leads to effective mentoring for students who might underachieve and identifies any students who underperform in a particular subject. Achievement in the sixth form is broadly average. The school recognises that some subjects perform very well but others less so.

Teaching is good at Key Stage 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Teachers have good subject knowledge and relationships in classes are positive. Inspectors observed six outstanding lessons with excellent teaching and assessment practice. However, not all teachers match work closely enough to the differing needs of students or use different forms of assessment to review learning during lessons. In the sixth form, teachers do not always ensure that students learn independently. The use of advanced skills teachers and a coaching system is beginning to promote effective practice but this is not fully established.

The curriculum has been reviewed and extended since the last inspection and students now benefit from a wider range of choices at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There are greater opportunities for vocational and work-related courses, including diploma courses offered in collaboration with other local schools. The success of science and other specialist subjects has improved participation in the sixth form.

The headteacher and senior staff set a clear vision for the school. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. Plans are clear and well focused. There is an improving trend of achievement, especially in English, mathematics and science. The curriculum has developed to meet students' needs. Senior and middle leaders monitor performance in their areas closely and take appropriate action to bring about improvement. However, the current framework of management based on the house system, while popular with students and effective in improving relationships, has resulted in a weakening of the

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

strategic overview of sixth form development. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of students' progress across the range of subjects by:
 - raising performance in those subjects where students do not reach their targets
 - focusing more closely on any students who are liable to underachieve in a particular subject.
- Ensure that all teachers:
 - match work closely to the differing needs and abilities of students
 - use assessment strategies regularly to aid learning in lessons
 - share the most effective practice in teaching and learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In 2010, Year 11 students' attainment was significantly above average in most indicators. Attainment has been steadily improving over the last five years. Results in science and information and communication technology (ICT) are especially high. Students from all social and ethnic backgrounds make good progress from their starting points, which are above average, and most match or exceed their challenging targets, especially in English and science. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because of very effective support and provision, endorsed by the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

In lessons, students make mostly good progress. They enjoy working in pairs and groups, and discuss ideas with enthusiasm. When given the opportunity, they take the initiative in learning and accurately assess their own work and that of their peers. They respond thoughtfully to teachers' questions and take pride in their work, wanting to do well. For example, in a technology lesson, students evaluated their group work and then that of their peers using a common format. They then compared the outcomes of the process better to understand the value of accurate evaluation.

Students feel very safe and trust staff to resolve any problems which they report. Behaviour is mature and controlled around the school and good in lessons. There is a very good range of cultural activities which students take up with interest and enthusiasm. They increasingly reflect on important issues and understand their place in society. Students have a good understanding of how to be healthy. They enjoy the healthy food available in the canteens, endorsed by Healthy Schools status, and regularly participate in the wide range of sporting activities made available to them. Students contribute strongly to the school and the community through a variety of roles including peer mentors, sports leaders and subject mentors. The school is developing a 'leadership academy' to promote these roles further. Students work together collaboratively, and apply their literacy, numeracy and computing skills effectively in lessons. They are well-informed about choices for future careers.

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

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
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	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teachers use a good range of activities to engage students' interests. They promote a positive approach in lessons and set high expectations. Objectives for learning are clear and students generally know their targets and understand how well they are doing. In the best lessons, teachers challenge students to resolve problems and use questions effectively to extend their thinking and to develop explanations. In these lessons, students often assess their own progress using specific criteria and develop an understanding of how they might improve their work. Very often, tasks are specifically directed to students with differing ability or needs. Teachers maintain a brisk pace and learning is purposeful. However, these skills are not yet consistent across all staff.

The curriculum offers good choice to students, including a wide range of vocational courses, through the four pathways established in 2009. These changes match students' needs and show improving trends in module tests. The school's specialist status has raised the profile of technology subjects and there are effective links with partner high and primary schools. Science is a strong subject with good links to the national Space Centre. Students benefit from a very wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities, including regular sports and cultural activities, international study trips and performances. Themed weeks and days enable a specific focus on important topics such as enterprise.

The school is a welcoming community where respect for others is strong. Staff provide good care for students. Those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, or

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

those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable in some way are able to access a wide range of flexible support, including a very effective mentoring system, additional studies or a reduced curriculum. This effective support has allowed individual students to deal with significant barriers to progress. The school works effectively with a wide range of other agencies. Transition arrangements from the high schools are thorough and valued by students. They also receive good advice on their routes through education and beyond, largely through the comprehensive care and guidance programme. Attendance has improved as a result of increasingly rigorous systems. The vertical tutoring system contributes to the ease with which students settle into the school, and provides continuity of contact between tutor and student. However, tutor time, which is central to the system, is not always used productively.

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 headteacher, senior staff and governing body set high expectations and have brought about steadily improving achievement. Staff are highly motivated and committed to the school's aims and vision. There is an effective cycle of monitoring and evaluation, shared by senior and middle leaders. They know the school's strengths and areas where development is required, devise clear and relevant plans and implement action. The quality of teaching is carefully monitored and there are effective systems for providing professional development. The developing coaching system is supporting individual teachers to improve.

The governing body has a strategic view of the school's development and is well organised, using the expertise of individual governors. Governors are linked to subjects and make regular visits. They review the school's performance and understand what needs to improve. Parents' and carers' responses to school and Ofsted questionnaires are very positive. There are regular contacts to update them on their child's progress. The broad range of partnerships, including sports, musical and curricular links, makes a strong contribution to students' achievement and personal development.

The school promotes equality well and addresses any discrimination robustly. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who may be vulnerable make outstanding progress. Their support is well planned and their progress continually reviewed. Issues of diversity, discrimination and stereotyping are addressed strongly through assemblies and through the care and guidance programme. Inspectors saw a drama group preparing a powerful piece for an assembly. Systems for ensuring the health and safeguarding of students are well established and rigorous. There are thorough

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

procedures for child protection and training is regularly updated. Students said that they feel very safe, and parents and carers agreed. However, some issues of access to the site arose during the inspection and these have been resolved effectively by the school.

The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. Students show a good understanding of the local community and there are effective international links. Their understanding of communities within this country as a whole is covered effectively in the curriculum but is not sufficiently supported through other links or activities.

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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form equips students effectively for the next stage of their lives and, as a result, almost all go on to higher education, employment or training. They reach standards broadly similar to students nationally in all qualifications. Given their starting points, which are broadly average, they make satisfactory progress. Students are positive about their experience and almost all complete their courses. They value the guidance and support they receive. They have responded well to the increased expectations the school has established regarding attendance, attitudes and work rate. They make a helpful contribution to the school and wider communities, through the school council, as prefects, as role models in vertical tutor groups and, for example, as sports leaders, peer and subject mentors. Teaching is satisfactory in general. Some is good, but there are insufficient opportunities for students to develop as independent learners. The curriculum offers a wide range of choices and there are plans to extend the range of vocational courses. Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, there is currently no clear strategic overview of provision and effectiveness in the sixth form.

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

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

Views of parents and carers

The percentage response to the questionnaire was broadly in line with that found nationally. The views of most of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are positive, especially in their endorsement of their child being safe, enjoying school and making progress. Eight responses commented on variation in the quality of teaching. Inspectors did identify some variation in the performance of different subjects and inconsistency in some approaches to teaching and assessment.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Robert Smyth 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 214 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1348 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	28	142	66	7	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	64	30	141	66	3	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	63	29	125	58	20	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	55	26	146	68	10	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	44	21	148	69	12	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	41	19	136	64	24	11	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	16	143	67	26	12	1	0
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)	63	29	132	62	12	6	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	47	22	155	72	7	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	40	19	133	62	22	10	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	15	139	65	19	9	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	52	24	145	68	6	3	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	74	35	130	61	6	3	1	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 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



11 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Robert Smyth School, Market Harborough, LE16 7JG

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you in lessons, meetings and at breaks. Thanks also to those of you who filled in a questionnaire. Your views helped us to find out about the school. This letter is to tell you what our conclusions are following the inspection.

Your school provides you with a good education. You told us that you generally enjoy school and that you feel safe there. Your attendance is above average and a good proportion of you stay into the sixth form. You mix well together, helped by the vertical tutor groups. The standards achieved by Year 11 are improving steadily and are well above the national average. You mostly make good progress in your learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and make lessons interesting, especially in practical subjects. Those of you who need additional help at any time receive very good support, including from the mentoring programme. You receive useful advice on choosing courses and careers. The curriculum offers you increasingly wide choice, with a wider range of vocational options now available. You also have very good opportunities through sports, cultural and other activities, including the weekly enrichment session. Many of you make a strong contribution to the school by taking on responsibilities and leadership roles. This is particularly so in the sixth form. Senior staff provide the school with a clear direction and have brought about steady improvements.

We asked the school to improve in some areas. These included:

- reducing the variation in your performance across different subjects
- improving the consistency with which teachers match work to your ability, use assessment in lessons and develop independent learning in the sixth form
- improving standards and progress in the sixth form through more strategic leadership.

You can help by making sure that you give your best in all the subjects which you take. I wish you success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg

Her Majesty's Inspector

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. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 1234 234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.