



Rainham School for Girls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118823
LEA Medway
Inspection number 280400
Inspection dates 24 May 2006 to 25 May 2006
Reporting inspector Heather Yaxley HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)	School address	Derwent Way
School category	Community		Rainham
Age range of pupils	11 to 19		Gillingham, Kent ME8 0BX
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01634 362746
Number on roll	1501	Fax number	01634 388334
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	6 December 1999	Headteacher	Mrs J Dunn

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 19	24 May 2006 - 25 May 2006	280400

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Rainham School for Girls is a large non-selective school in a selective authority. It was designated as a Technology College in 1996 and has collaborative sixth form arrangements with two other schools. There are 156 students in the sixth form. Students start the school with standards of work that are below that which would be expected for their age and the proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is above the national average. Fourteen students have a statement of special educational need. Almost all students are of White British heritage with 2% from other ethnic groups.

The school holds the Investor in People award, the Basic Skills Quality Mark, and the Medway Inclusive School Quality Mark. Through the Rainham Training Partnership the school is active in the training of teachers and support staff in collaboration with a local infant and junior school.

During the inspection Year 10 students were on work experience and Year 12 on study leave. Students in Years 11 and 13 were involved in public examinations in some subjects and others had already taken place.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Leaders, managers and governors at Rainham School for Girls rightly assess their overall effectiveness as satisfactory. The achievement that students make is satisfactory in relation to their starting points and is generally consistent, but slow to improve over recent years. Students do not do as well in English and information and communication technology (ICT) as they do in other subjects and the most able students are not always challenged enough to reach their potential. The leadership team is determined to remedy this and has been effective in taking appropriate action. Inspection evidence shows that lessons are not always as exciting as they need to be to actively engage students in their own learning and some teachers do not effectively use resources and available technology.

The school is a popular first choice for students and their families when looking for secondary school placement. Surveys and questionnaires reveal high levels of satisfaction with the provision. The school is a calm place where orderly and purposeful movement sometimes makes it difficult to believe that there are so many girls moving around the buildings. The majority of students are happy, friendly and have good relationships with staff. The good attention that staff give to individuals enables girls to develop good personal skills and aspirations.

In relation to students' achievement and the good range of courses available to older students, value for money is satisfactory. The capacity to make further improvements is satisfactory because overall standards have been maintained over a period of time, issues from the last inspection have been addressed effectively and recent initiatives are beginning to make a difference to students' progress.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Provision in the sixth form is satisfactory and this is also the view of the school. Complex consortium arrangements with two other schools work effectively, providing a wide range of options at different levels which match students' needs well. Different groups of students learn in different schools to achieve maximum curriculum flexibility. Attainment on entry is below average. Achievement varies year on year, between individuals, subjects and groups, and is satisfactory overall. Many students initially lack self-esteem but staff raise aspirations well. This results in increasingly successful applications to higher education. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with much good teaching observed. Students from different schools work well together, valuing opportunities to learn in varying ways from different teachers. All take advantage of enrichment opportunities which result in good personal development. These include chances to gain a qualification in critical thinking or general studies. Students speak highly of their excellent relationships with staff and rightly commend the very effective individual guidance, care and support they receive. Management at school level is satisfactory and plans to expand the role of the head of sixth form are timely. Data analysis does not currently provide enough information about the relative performance

of groups so this is difficult to track. Capacity to improve sixth form provision is good as shown in the response to issues raised during the last inspection, with good improvements made to the range of appropriate courses available.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve achievement in English and ICT, and for the most able in all subjects
- improve the quality of learning, ensuring that teachers use more creative and stimulating teaching approaches, including wider use of available technology.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The progress that students make is satisfactory overall in the main school and in the sixth form. Standards are below average when students join the school, at the end of Year 9 and again at the end of Years 11 and 13. In 2005, targets for Year 9 in mathematics and science were exceeded slightly and standards in both subjects show improvement over a three-year period in Years 9 and 11. Standards of work in English for Year 9 have been consistently below expectations and slow to improve. Recent action taken to address this, especially in relation to the underperformance of the most able, is beginning to have an impact. GCSE results at five or more grades A*–G over the last three years have been consistently higher than average but have been below average at grades A*–C. In 2005 there were strengths in mathematics and French, but weaknesses in ICT.

Overall, students make satisfactory progress in all years from their low starting points, benefiting from action arising from individual monitoring. Current work to improve class and subject tracking has pinpointed areas for development in the curriculum and in teaching. This is beginning to enhance students' learning although its impact is not consistently beneficial across all subjects and teachers. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are most vulnerable make satisfactory progress as a result of thorough support for their specific needs. Progress at GCSE for the most able is constrained by limited opportunities to explore higher level ideas.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The students' personal development and well-being are good in the main school and in the sixth form. Most students enjoy their education and say that the school is 'a happy place where everyone is friendly'. They feel safe and secure in the knowledge that staff and friends will help to resolve any problems that arise. They report that bullying and racial incidents do occur but are rare and this is confirmed in the responses to questionnaires by parents and carers, the majority of whom say that their children feel safe and that behaviour in school is good. Girls develop increasing understanding of their health, as well as their emotional and physical well-being, in part because they respond positively to regular discussions and drop-in sessions with the school nurse.

They are keen to learn more and have asked for additional health-related activities during focus days.

Overall, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students cooperate well in class and socially they enjoy one another's company. Attendance is satisfactory; students arrive promptly to lessons and settle quickly to tasks. They work hard in lessons and feel that although staff are strict, this helps them to 'keep on track'. Behaviour is often very good in lessons and movement around the school is orderly and purposeful. The school has identified that sometimes students rely too heavily on adults to direct their learning and lack self-confidence. However, students are very pro-active in their support for those less fortunate than themselves and consistently raise funds for charity. Some students in the sixth form make particularly good contributions to the community as special constables. Students are well prepared for future options, taking advantage of very good careers guidance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in all years, with examples of excellent practice in several subjects. Teachers have very good relationships with students and encourage them to do well by making them feel they can succeed. The best lessons start with activities which are fast and interesting and do not go on too long; they end with time to pull together what has been learned. Learning is hampered when teachers allow students to chatter when they should be paying attention.

In Year 7 students enjoy their 'Learning to Learn' lessons where they study, for example, how the brain works and what is meant by different learning styles. In a successful Year 13 history lesson, the teacher's understanding of different learning styles significantly helped students' revision. Particularly in mathematics, teachers prepare students thoroughly for tests and examinations. Mostly though, teachers do not incorporate the imaginative activities in lessons needed to ensure good achievement.

Learning support assistants are experienced and well qualified. They know when and how much support to offer students and work collaboratively with teachers to develop students' understanding. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are taught well and given adapted work to match their capabilities. Occasionally, able students complete work before others and do not move on fast enough. The school has already identified this as an area for development.

Most teachers plan their lessons carefully and students are clear about what they are meant to learn. Teachers stress subject specific vocabulary and encourage students to speak and listen in lessons. In French lessons, which are delivered at a fast pace, students speak confidently in the language. In the sixth form critical thinking lessons, students benefit from regular debates and discussions of topical issues. Teachers do not use the interactive whiteboards very often and some lack the confidence to exploit their potential to stimulate learning.

There is much marking that is detailed and helpful, telling students what they need to do to improve, particularly in the sixth form. Teachers assess students' abilities and work accurately and, combined with the analysis of data, they use this information to set realistic targets, which they encourage students to exceed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school curriculum is good. It is broad and well matched to the girls' needs. Staff work closely in consultation with students so that virtually all students in Years 10 and 11 are able to follow a range of academic, vocational and technology subjects. In the sixth form, consortium arrangements also ensure a wide variety of choice for students. Recent developments such as 'fast-track' groupings in Years 7 and 8 are contributing to raising standards.

Stimulating enrichment activities, such as focus days on health or 'Challenging Prejudice', raising money for charities such as the children of Chernobyl, and enterprise schemes such as Year 11 students working with Body Shop, all contribute significantly to their personal development. Students' basic skills in literacy and numeracy are fostered well. Participation in a range of design and technology projects, such as the Steel Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) Challenge, helps to build students' self-confidence and presentation skills and prepares them well for the world of work. The citizenship and personal, social and health education programmes are very effective and much appreciated by the girls. 'It helps us cope with things and really makes you think', one student said.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support students receive are good. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities receive a well-considered balance of support in lessons and separate work in small groups, to improve their reading or mathematics, for example. They and their parents are fully involved in discussions about progress. The school does everything possible to help vulnerable students who have problems with behaviour or home life to cope. Support from outside agencies or alternative courses are sought whenever possible.

Although the year groups are large, students feel safe and value the time they spend with their tutors each day. Tutor time is used effectively to monitor progress with individuals and to discuss ways in which they might improve their work. The governors and headteacher have made students' safety a top priority, with robust child protection and staff vetting procedures carried out meticulously and sensitively.

Careers advice and guidance and the development of work-related learning are very good. From Year 7 onwards students are encouraged to think about their future careers and needs. There are many opportunities to make work-place visits and to hear visiting speakers. The school also does much to encourage girls to consider less traditional career paths in, for example, engineering and the construction industries.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The leadership team accurately evaluates its effectiveness in raising achievement as satisfactory. It has been successful in maintaining high quality care and support to students, making a very positive contribution to their personal skills and opportunities. In particular, very good attention is given to ensure that most girls follow examination courses of their choice. Although the team has successfully maintained a general standard of academic achievement the trend is static and slow to improve in some subjects.

Leaders, managers and governors know their school well and actively seek the views of others when considering how well they are doing. Although self-evaluation is generally accurate, information from monitoring is not always used effectively to raise staff expectations for high standards through good quality teaching and learning. The school is already taking steps to address this. Suitable changes are in place to improve the management of data, redefine roles and responsibilities within new staffing structures and establish new approaches to staff development which are clearly focused on raising achievement. These initiatives have not yet had time to make enough difference to students' progress but contribute to the satisfactory capacity to make further improvements.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

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 disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	4
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

It was a pleasure to inspect Rainham School for Girls last week. On behalf of the inspection team I would like to thank you for the warm welcome that we received. We took into consideration the comments that you made to us in groups or as individuals and would also like to thank members of your family who completed the questionnaire. There were almost 300 questionnaires for us to look at. It was good to hear so many good things about the school. You told us that you get good support from staff and you could not think of many things that you wanted to change.

We judge the school to be satisfactory overall in the way in which it enables you to be successful. The curriculum is good, you are well supported in the development of your personal skills and are well prepared for life after school.

We hope that you will read the full report for more details of what we found during the inspection (it is not too long!) and think about how you can get involved in the things that staff want to do to improve still further. We have asked Mrs Dunn, the staff and governors to look at improving the progress that you make so that you all achieve as much as you can, especially in English and information and communication technology (ICT). We have also asked them to improve the quality of learning so that teachers encourage you to participate more in lessons.

I wish you well in all that you want to achieve for yourselves in the future.

Thank you again.