

# Ratton School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114604
<b>Local Authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	289989
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 March 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Steffi Penny HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1183
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Lindsey
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Linsell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 April 2001
<b>School address</b>	Park Avenue Eastbourne BN21 2XR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01323 504011
<b>Fax number</b>	01323 520364

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The school is much larger than average and is generally oversubscribed, attracting students from all over Eastbourne. It has been awarded international schools status for the second time as well as the Artsmark Gold Award from the Arts Council of England. Since 2002, it has had specialist status for the performing arts (drama, music and dance).

The vast majority of students are White British and speak English fluently. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties is smaller than the national average.

The school is part of an Eastbourne and Hailsham 14-19 federation with all other secondary and special schools in the area, along with the local post-16 college. There is a jointly employed 14-19 manager to develop this shared provision.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Ratton is a good school, providing a good quality of education. Good leadership and management have ensured that the school has been successful in improving achievement and standards, and is restoring them to the levels of the previous inspection after a dip in performance in 2003. Self-evaluation is based on effective use of data that is giving the school a more accurate view of its performance.

Students join the school with broadly average standards. Throughout the school in 2006, achievement was satisfactory and standards were around the national average. Much has been achieved over the last year and the learning opportunities for students are now much improved, to the point where progress and achievement are now good. This improvement has been brought about by the hard work of the school in monitoring and supporting the quality of teaching. Good use has been made of external specialists to provide in-service training. This, along with the school taking a sharper focus on checking students' learning, is raising standards. There are a small number of students who are vulnerable for one reason or another, for instance having a learning difficulty. Early intervention and good support enables them to achieve as well as their peers.

Whilst the school has tackled most of the previous weaknesses in teaching, inconsistencies remain in the application by staff of policies and systems, with the result that students' progress and enjoyment are greater in some lessons than others. Senior leaders acknowledge that inconsistencies remain in these areas, particularly the quality of feedback to students about their work, and have plans to reduce them.

Most students have positive attitudes to learning, but not enough are developing the skills of independent learning so that they come to lessons ready to work. Permanent exclusions are extremely rare but there are too many short-term exclusions and the school has yet to succeed in providing sufficient resources for good alternatives. Several of these students are repeat offenders, demonstrating that they and their families are not working closely enough with the school.

The school is very outward-looking and ready to work with others to take up exciting new initiatives which will help it develop and improve its provision. Examples of this are the specialist status for the performing arts and the international schools status which have a good impact on the work of the school, particularly in assisting students to make good contributions to their own and other communities. There are very good opportunities for students to develop their basic skills and engage in collaborative activities, which will stand them in good stead for the future. Students are well cared for and procedures for safeguarding them are good. They say they feel safe and know that there is always someone to talk to.

The school currently has a good curriculum which meets the needs of all its students. However, there is the potential to make learning even more stimulating and challenging by increasing creativity in lessons and providing more opportunities for students to have a greater role in and understanding of their learning. Because of its willingness to welcome change and its ability to work hard, the capacity of the school to improve further is good.

### What the school should do to improve further

- ensure that teachers' marking helps students understand what to do next to improve their work

- work more closely with parents to help all students take greater responsibility for their own behaviour and heighten their desire for learning consistently apply the systems and policies that the school has developed, particularly to improve attendance, punctuality and enjoyment of learning.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement and standards have both continued to improve since 2003. Achievement in external examinations and tests for 2006 was satisfactory and standards were around the national average. Inspection evidence and detailed school records show that students are now making good progress and achievement is now good. In Years 10 and 11, this is due to more frequent intervention strategies that accurately identify and support students who are failing to reach their challenging targets. These strategies have been honed well to identify individual student needs in individual subjects.

Throughout the school, the greater consistency of lesson planning and modelling of good practice is helping students to make good progress. In Years 7 to 9, students' mock tests show that they are on target to reach standards that are higher than the national average, representing good achievement and progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

The school judged the personal development and well-being of students as good; inspection evidence shows that it is satisfactory. Most students behave and attend well and are punctual but evidence from students, parents and inspection observations show a persistent group of students for whom this is not the case. Behaviour is satisfactory overall but the rate of fixed term exclusions is higher than the national average; a number of these involve repeat offenders. In order to reduce the impact of inappropriate behaviour in the future, the school has taken some sensible steps such as investing in new lavatories so that they do not need to be locked up. Attendance has improved this year and is broadly in line with national figures. Punctuality is satisfactory Students' attitudes in lessons vary. Some teachers have to work hard in lessons to promote positive attitudes and for students to take a lead in their learning.

Students feel secure. They say they can turn to adults if they have academic or personal difficulties. The impact of changes to promote healthy living has so far been satisfactory, although parents and students still see smoking on or near the school site as an issue. There is no dedicated space for students to eat their packed lunches during inclement weather.

Students' positive contributions to the community include performances, responding charitably to appeals and taking positions of responsibility in the school. Students with positions of responsibility show a mature attitude to the school and their learning, but they say they would welcome greater feedback when their views are sought. Skills for the workplace are developed well.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, with students making satisfactory progress. Particular strengths are the cultural opportunities to which many students respond enthusiastically. Students comment that they respond well when adults provide positive role models.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. In some cases where teaching is good, the learning is not quite as good because the attitudes of students restrict progress.

In most lessons, students make good progress because planning is very good and students are set clear targets for improvement which are very closely related to examination or national testing criteria. There are a good range of activities for students of all abilities in these lessons and students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. As a result, they enjoy these lessons and are keen to learn. When teaching is not so good, as well as attitudes being a barrier to progress, the pace of the lessons is slow and the teachers' questioning is superficial and does not identify students' basic misunderstandings. In these lessons, students are not encouraged to take any responsibility for their learning.

Students with learning difficulties are identified and the response of teachers in most lessons ensures good progress. Teaching assistants are generally effective in supporting students with learning difficulties although in a few lessons, not all of these students receive the appropriate support. Gifted and talented students are identified early. Teachers provide them with relevant and challenging work.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

All students benefit from the improved provision that specialist arts college status has provided. The curriculum enables students, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, to make good progress. A strong element of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is the flexible provision made for those students with particular needs or interests. Good links with external providers complement in-house provision in making available alternative timetables for those who are less academic and for those who are gifted and talented. Some able students may also take exams early.

The curriculum makes good provision for the development of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. The personal, health, social and citizenship education programme is providing a good base for the improvement of students' personal development, though it has not yet resulted in students taking better responsibility for their attitudes and learning.

A full programme of after-school activities takes place, offering sport and arts as well as extra preparation for examinations and activities for the gifted and talented. A large proportion of students take part in this and many told inspectors how much they value the efforts of staff that provide this.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is good. The appropriate arrangements for health and safety and child protection are in place and key staff keep detailed records of the needs of vulnerable students. These are identified early. Those staff responsible for students' pastoral care meet regularly and work closely with relatives. They willingly invoke

the expertise of external agencies to determine the best way of supporting students. There is further assistance, frequently from associate staff, for those with learning difficulties or disabilities and because of this, they progress as well as others. Students with emotional and behavioural difficulties are given many opportunities to solve their problems with the support of their learning leaders, mentors and older students.

Intelligent use of data helps to track individual students' academic progress, identifying those who are not coming up to expectation. Support can consequently be given, with the help of their families, and subject teachers. Most students are aware of their targets, especially at the end of modules and where they are compared with National Curriculum levels. Not enough of them fully understand how they can reach the next level. Students receive good careers advice and are made aware of all courses available to them, including vocational options.

Students new to the country are sympathetically supported by other students and experts from outside, but there is little extra resource available specifically for them in the school. Nevertheless, they make good academic progress.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides clear direction and is well supported by a recently restructured senior leadership team. There is now a sharper focus on improving teaching and learning which is understood by all staff and reflected by the responsibilities of the senior leadership team. Targets identified in the last inspection report have been met.

Middle managers have made a valuable contribution to the recent improvements in teaching and learning and the achievement of students. Although targets for GCSE were not met in 2006, systems for tracking the progress of students have been refined and students who are underachieving are clearly identified and provided with very good support. Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are good and are accompanied by appropriate intervention and support.

Arrangements for organising and deciding on priorities for staff development are clearly linked to established school priorities and are valued by staff. Arrangements for sharing good practice in the school are good. For example, different methods for intervening with students who are underachieving have been compared between departments and refined as a result. Although there is a clear policy for the management of behaviour, this is not being applied consistently.

Governors are very supportive. They have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are actively involved in helping the school to improve. Financial systems are secure. Generally, efficient use is made of resources.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

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

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for contributing to the inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to what you and your parents had to say about your school. I am able to tell you that you are getting a good education. We also found very clear evidence that the school is still improving.

Most of you are playing your part in maximising your life chances by ensuring you go to school regularly, show an interest in lessons and tackle homework. One or two of you could be doing more to help yourselves by following the school rules and behaving better. We have asked the school to work more closely with your parents so that you all do even better because you want to learn more. Many of you take advantage of the good opportunities to take part in sports, music and drama activities during the lunchtime and after school, as well as trips abroad. Many of you told us how much you appreciate the work that the staff do for you and the good care and guidance that they provide.

Teaching is good and we know that you are making good progress in your work. Some of you said, and we agree, that staff were not always consistent in the way that they followed some of the school procedures, for example in attendance, punctuality, helping you to enjoy your learning and telling you how to make you work better. Because of this, you make varying progress in different subjects, or in the same subject with different teachers. We have asked the school to focus on making sure that school procedures are followed more regularly so that your progress is even better. You know how well you are doing compared with all other young people of the same age but we have also asked the school to ensure you know exactly what you have to do to improve your performance in each subject.

I hope you will help the staff to make your school even better by continuing to work hard, arriving at lessons on time, being prepared to work and come to school as often as you can. Best wishes for the future!