

The Robert Smyth School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120237
Local Authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	313561
Inspection dates	16–17 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Dilip Kadodwala 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	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	864
6th form	482
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Max Corney
Headteacher	Colin Dean
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2003
School address	Burnmill Road Market Harborough LE16 7JG
Telephone number	01858 440770
Fax number	01858 433096

Age group	14-19
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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

This is a larger than average school. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. A very small number are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Although there is some rural deprivation locally, the students' overall socio-economic background is favourable. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also well below average, although the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs is average. The school has had specialist status in technology since September 1998 and also in arts since April 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Robert Smyth is a good school. It has continued to improve over recent years and has rightly grown in popularity. Students make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11, but good progress by the end of Year 13. Standards attained in examinations are above national averages and there has been a continuous trend of improvement in the proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. This reflects the good teaching students receive, including in the sixth form. The school's specialist status has helped to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and teachers plan lessons carefully to cater for students' different abilities. Teachers' enthusiasm and subject expertise ensure that teaching is lively, and students respond positively. They enjoy learning and show this by attending regularly and being punctual. Students have a good understanding of their target grades and their level of progress. Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good, because these aspects are promoted across the school. Students are encouraged to live healthily and most do so. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Students feel valued and safe. They make a positive contribution to school, for example through mentoring, and to the wider community. These positive aspects reflect the good level of care and support students receive, particularly for those most in need. Students benefit from a good curriculum and their enjoyment is enhanced by their high level of participation in enrichment and extra-curricular activities. The school's specialist status has made a positive impact through increased facilities and opportunities. Leadership and management are good. Good leadership from the headteacher, ably supported by the senior leadership team, ensures that the promotion of high standards drives the school forward. Success is evident in the continuous improvement in GCSE results over recent years and sustained good achievement in the sixth form. Within this picture, higher attaining students did not do as well as the school expected in 2007 and students' progress in Years 10 and 11 was no more than satisfactory, given their attainment at the end of Year 9, but robust systems for tracking students' progress and targeted intervention are already ensuring improvement in both areas. Higher attaining students now make satisfactory progress and there are well judged strategies in place to lift the progress students make in Years 10 and 11. Senior leaders are confident that the 2008 examination results will reflect the impact of the action taken so far. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) have been below average. Staff recruitment and retention has been a barrier but the introduction of a new course is showing signs of improvement, although it is too early to judge its full impact.

Governance is good. Governors act as able ambassadors for the school and hold senior leaders to account. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and this, coupled with the school's good awareness of its strengths and weaknesses, indicates that the capacity for further improvement is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a good sixth form. Standards at the end of Year 13 are above average and students make consistently good progress. This progress results from good teaching. Teachers have good levels of knowledge of their subject and their enthusiasm stimulates students' desire to learn. Teachers know their students very well and so adapt learning to suit individual needs. Work is regularly marked, with detailed comments providing good quality advice on how to make further

improvements. The range of A level subjects offered is extensive and attracts a very high proportion of Year 11 students to transfer to the sixth form. The school has firm plans to increase the smaller range of vocational courses in order to raise achievement further, especially for those entering the sixth form with lower GCSE grades.

The personal development of students is good. Students display mature attitudes towards their studies and are prepared well for higher education. Over 90% of students in Year 13 enter university, with transition supported by the good links between the school and universities and colleges. Some of the highest attaining students apply to Oxbridge. The vast majority of students take advantage of additional opportunities offered, contributing significantly to life in the school and the local community. A recently restructured leadership team is functioning well. This, combined with sustained levels of achievement, indicates that capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the drive to improve students' progress in Years 10 and 11 accelerates so that all ability groups, including the higher attaining students, make at least good progress.
- Raise students' standards in ICT so that students make the progress of which they are capable.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Attainment on entry is above average. Students make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11 and the great majority transfer into the sixth form, where their progress is consistently good. In 2007, the proportion of students who attained five or more higher GCSE A* to C grades continued to be above the national average. The proportion attaining five or more higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, also continued to be above average, but within this context of continuing improvement, higher attaining students, particularly girls, did not do as well as the school expected. The school's performance tracking data indicate that the more able students are now making satisfactory progress. Realistic and suitably challenging targets are set to raise attainment further, particularly for the current Year 10 students, who are a higher attaining group. The needs of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met well so that they make good progress. Achievement in ICT has been a particular weakness but is now beginning to rise with the introduction of a new course.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students come to school showing enthusiasm. They have very positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour in and around school is good. Bullying is rare and students say that teachers take a very firm line on any incidents and resolve them quickly; students therefore feel very safe. Attendance and punctuality are good and fixed-term exclusions have reduced significantly since the last inspection. As well as enjoying their lessons, students participate extensively in a wide programme of extra-curricular activities, particularly in some sports. This promotes their fitness and they have a good awareness of healthy living, including healthy eating. They feel well informed and consulted about their school. As a result, students feel they are listened to very well and they are proud of some of their initiatives such as the introduction of a lunchtime

pass system. The student council has been active in promoting healthy meals, a safer outside school environment and stricter monitoring of smoking that has led to significant improvement. Students make many contributions to their school and local community through support for charities and by taking positions of responsibility such as peer mentoring. In all, this means that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. Students' social and moral development is particularly strong because of the very good quality of pastoral care. Students develop good skills in literacy and numeracy, and this prepares them well for their next stage in learning. Because of effective transition procedures and guidance, almost all students proceed directly on to further education, employment or training when they leave the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The relationships between students and teachers are positive and support learning. Teachers' enthusiasm inspires students and contributes well to their sense of enjoyment in learning and increasing their self-confidence. Typically, lessons have a clear structure and well focused activities which challenge students. The sharing of learning objectives and the effective use of sessions to recap learning underpin good or better teaching. The careful monitoring of teaching and learning has improved the quality, as has the sharing of good practice supported by the school's specialist status. Teachers assess students' progress accurately and students are clear about the targets set for their learning. Teachers' marking is usually helpful so that students know how to improve their work. Learning support assistants are used effectively to support students' learning, both as individuals and in small groups. Where lessons are less effective, particularly in Years 10 and 11, the pace is slower and lower expectations limit more rapid progress in learning. Students' involvement in assessing their own learning is also weaker in these year groups.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum offers a good breadth of choice, is inclusive and is responsive to students' learning needs. Curricular review has led to the opening up of opportunities for students, particularly vocational pathways. The identification of gifted and talented students has enabled them to have access to a sound range of opportunities, including sessions on critical thinking. The school's specialist status has led to enhanced resources, and more options are possible through collaboration with local providers, including another upper school and a post-16 college. Of particular note is the work-related provision for students throughout the school, for example as carried out through enterprise activities. This helps to develop students' self-confidence and skills to achieve their future economic well-being. The provision for ICT has been a weakness, but is improving now that the course offered is more suited to students' abilities. The very good range of extra-curricular activities is much praised by the students themselves and the level of uptake is high. Out-of-school trips are well supported and contribute much to the students' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school attaches a high degree of importance to students' welfare. There are robust procedures for safeguarding students, and good links with external support organisations ensure that students attend regularly and learn in a healthy and safe environment. Parents feel that their children enjoy school and are well supported and looked after. The recent introduction of a vertical tutor group system enables daily contact between students of all ages during tutor time and this is having a positive impact. Teachers and students use tutor time to promote social and cultural development and provide individual support. A detailed monitoring system for attendance, behaviour and learning ensures that students who need it receive focused support quickly. As a result, the school is successful in promoting positive behaviour and supporting students with specific learning needs. Close collaboration with partner schools ensures that students receive well informed guidance from staff when making their subject, further education and career choices. Students are aware of their current grades and the progress they make because their academic guidance is good, although leaders have rightly identified that students are not yet consistently involved in self- and peer assessment in Years 10 and 11 across all subjects, to match the effective practice in the sixth form.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher provides unwaveringly good leadership and is ably supported by the senior leadership team members. Staff share the strategic direction set for the school so that a common purpose of continuous improvement drives it forward. Senior leaders work hard to involve parents and community members to support the school's work, with a good degree of success. Self-evaluation and school improvement planning are strong and involve managers at all levels. Views expressed by parents and students inform improvement planning. Faculty evaluations accurately identify strengths and areas for further development. There is regular and focused monitoring of teaching and learning, supported by a robust tracking system of students' progress. Consequently, there are timely interventions to tackle underperformance so that there has been success, for instance, in identifying and improving boys' performance. However, action taken to improve the achievement of the higher attaining students is not yet consistently good across all subjects.

Targets set for raising standards are realistic and challenging and the close monitoring of progress ensures that these are mostly met. Success in attaining specialist school targets has been variable. In 2007, science met them and drama exceeded expectations. Targets in mathematics and in design and technology fell short by a very few percentage points.

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Annex A

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?	2	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	2	2

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	3	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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?	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 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?	2	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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

Dear Students

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

Many thanks for helping us with the inspection of your school. We greatly appreciate your courtesy and friendliness. Your comments have helped us to make our evaluations.

We judged that your school is good, including the sixth form. This is because the senior staff of the school know what it does well, and why, and what to do to make it even better in the future. Their drive to make sure that you get a good deal has meant that your standards at GCSE, including English and mathematics, are above average. Standards at the end of A-level studies are also above average. Your progress by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory, but it is good for the great majority of you who leave at the end of Year 13.

The quality of teaching is good overall. The school provides good pastoral support and this helps to meet your personal needs. Your progress is checked regularly and good direction is given to show you how you can improve your work further. Your own involvement in assessing learning is better in the sixth form than it is in Years 10 and 11 and teachers are already redressing the balance. You make the best of opportunities offered to voice your opinions about life in school. Your involvement in the school council makes a material difference that is positive and shows that senior leaders do listen to your views and act on them when they can.

The curriculum and other activities the school offers are good. We were impressed by the wide range of options in the sixth form and acknowledge that the school's attempt to widen the range to include vocational courses is well judged. The impact of the action that has been taken to improve information and communication technology has been limited, but we think this is now improving. We have asked senior leaders to make sure that this continues and you can play your part by getting your coursework in on time. We think your progress should be better than it is by the end of Year 11, given your prior attainment in primary and high schools, so we have also asked senior leaders to ensure that this improves. You can help by continuing to attend regularly, asking teachers for greater challenges in your work and rising to them when they do!

With best wishes for your future.

Dilip Kadodwala Her Majesty's Inspector



18 April 2008

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With best wishes for your future.

Dilip Kadodwala
Her Majesty's Inspector