

Darrick Wood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101658
Local Authority	Bromley
Inspection number	323502
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Meena Wood 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 (total)	1683
Sixth form	382
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Hewitt
Headteacher	Mrs Barbara Rhymaun
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2005
School address	Lovibonds Avenue Orpington BR6 8ER
Telephone number	01689 850271
Fax number	01689 857257

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	29–30 April 2009
Inspection number	323502

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

Darrick Wood School is a large comprehensive with a sixth form. It is bordered by selective schools and the school's intake comes from the local owner-occupied housing and social housing estates. The school has Technology College status and has received a number of awards in recognition of excellence, including the Healthy School Award and Sportsmark Award. The school is a Microsoft Academy, allowing professional qualifications to be offered to both students and members of the wider community.

The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and for whom English is not their first language are low. The most common heritage languages spoken are Urdu and Turkish. The school has low numbers of students in receipt of free school meals. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, is low. These include behavioural, emotional, social and communication needs, dyslexia and autism. The school has a Centre for the Deaf on site with 18 students who are fully integrated into the school and receive specialist tuition within the Centre. The school also has family learning provision on site and sports facilities used by local communities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Darrick Wood School is an outstanding school. The headteacher and her senior leadership team have provided excellent direction for the school in driving up achievement and standards. They have created a strong ethos for the school, summed up in its corporate quality goal 'striving for the highest standards in all aspects of school life' and through 'all students and staff taking a pride in and feeling responsible for the success of the school'. One parent said 'At Darrick Wood students are taught to respect not only the school but teaching staff, their peers and the local community.' The school is a popular choice with potential Year 7 and Year 12 entrants and certainly provides an inspirational learning environment for its students, as observed through the excellent artwork and imaginative handicrafts displayed everywhere around the school. As one teacher commented, it is a joy for her to teach in this school.

Achievement and standards are outstanding as the majority of students enter the school with above national average levels of attainment, make excellent progress in their learning and are on track to attain appreciably above national average standards in the current year. These results are achieved overall through excellent teaching, careful tracking of students' progress through academic reviews, parental support and mentoring, as well as additional revision classes. An excellent pastoral system has resulted in outstanding personal development and well-being for all students, who display respectful and exemplary behaviour. Students are highly motivated and enjoy their learning immensely, and attendance is well above national averages.

The school has developed an outstanding and responsive curriculum, including high levels of participation and standards in most of the specialist subjects. All students have well-structured opportunities within the curriculum to develop their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. They receive excellent advice and guidance on choosing their GCSE and vocational choices in Year 9 and further progression options in Year 11.

Teaching and learning are excellent because teachers know their students well and work hard to help them achieve their potential. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively in lessons and students who are hard of hearing or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive excellent learning support that helps them fulfil their potential. Academic guidance and monitoring of students' progress enables all students to work well towards their personal and academic targets. Marking of students' work is constructively helpful, but in a minority of subjects this is not always regularly carried out.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher's leadership is inspirational to her staff. Her vision and clear direction for this inclusive school have successfully focused her highly committed managers and staff on raising achievement for all students. The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is excellent. However, the school has recognised that its internal observations of teaching and learning sometimes need a greater focus on learning and progress. The school has clearly addressed weaknesses in teaching from the last inspection, and this gives the school outstanding capacity to improve further. A parent summed up the learning experience at the school 'as a well rounded education in a supportive environment'.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are outstanding. There is a wide range of prior attainment on entry into the sixth form with considerable differences year-on-year. Standards in 2008 were above average and achievement was good overall. Reliable, but unvalidated, school data for standards in 2009 indicate good improvement in higher grades, overall pass rates and in average point scores. This indicates that students currently in the sixth form who entered with broadly average standards are making outstanding progress. This continues the rising trend in achievement and standards for this popular and well-subscribed sixth form. Staying-on rates into the sixth form have increased. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Students' attitudes to work are good and often exceptional. They are eager to learn, respond very well to good challenge and develop sound independent learning skills. Students appreciate the excellent guidance that they are given about the courses they should follow in the sixth form, or at other centres, and say that, as a result, courses fully match their needs and aspirations. They also speak highly of the guidance they receive for their future careers. Students are aware of their learning goals. Progress against targets is very effectively monitored and the marking of student work often provides excellent advice upon how to improve. Students who underachieve are very well supported by a range of strategies including very effective mentoring. The school has recognised the need to cater for a wider range of students and provides applied GCE courses. Diploma courses will be introduced in 2011. Opportunities for enrichment are excellent and a large proportion of students participate in these activities. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. There are clear strengths, including a good understanding of areas of development and how to implement improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that marking of students' work is regularly carried out across all subjects.
- Ensure that there is a greater focus on learning and progress of students in lessons during internal observations of teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Most students made good progress between Years 7 and 11, and achieved above national average standards between 2005 and 2007, but in the last year students only made satisfactory progress from Year 7 to 9 with students making good progress in Years 10 and 11. Although students enter in Year 7 with above national average levels of attainment, reading standards on entry exceed writing standards. For instance, current Year 7 students entered school with 40 students at Level 5 in reading who were at Level 4 in their writing. Over the last two years in recognition of this, the school has ensured students fulfil their potential through careful scrutiny of their progress by achievement coordinators and through establishing more effective assessment practice in lessons. Therefore, students currently in Year 11 are now making outstanding progress and are on track to achieve standards that are considerably above national averages in five A* to C GCSEs (both including and excluding English and mathematics). Inspectors observed the successful impact of these actions on learning and progress in lessons and this was also evidenced in current school and national assessment data. For instance, over the last four years the numbers of students who make four plus levels of progress between

Year 7 and Year 11 in English, mathematics and science has risen year on year, exceeding national averages.

Students who are hearing impaired, those with moderate learning difficulties, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and those with autism make outstanding progress as they are very effectively supported in lessons. The school is creating greater challenge for higher-attaining students, especially girls, and its teaching and extra-curricular strategies are having a positive impact as the numbers of higher grades are predicted to rise above the national averages this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students enjoy coming to school, as their high attendance and take-up of the many extra-curricular activities shows. They particularly enjoy the many lively, active lessons. Their behaviour around the school is exemplary and exclusions are rare. They have excellent rapport with teachers and this attitude contributes well to their high achievement. Students know how to keep themselves safe and healthy in a broad range of situations, including using the internet, keeping fit and assessing risk. There is a very strong ethos of serving the community, both within the school and the wider world. A large proportion of students are successful in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, and older students help younger ones with reading. Students are keen to be involved in making and influencing decisions, for example improving school catering to its present high standard. The school prepares students extremely well for their futures by ensuring they leave with excellent academic skills and a strong work ethic. Students also demonstrate an ability to be self-critical, a sense of enterprise and sound financial understanding. They are respectful of cultural and gender differences and most display an intelligent and thoughtful understanding of social diversity. Students are involved in reaching out to local, national and global communities, for instance by taking part in the Dolly Parton campaign to promote literacy and actively financing the building and maintenance of a school in Nepal. As one parent said, 'The school has found the best my child has to offer and allowed her to flourish.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Students enjoy their lessons enormously because, as one said, 'the teachers make you get up and do something in the lesson'. Students are actively engaged in the great majority of lessons. Teachers ask them challenging questions, encouraging students to think for themselves and to discuss their findings with classmates. Students are encouraged to assess their own and classmates' progress, and this active participation in their own learning is an important factor in their making excellent progress. In one outstanding English lesson the teacher requested students to self-evaluate their learning on stickers on the board, so that they and she would be aware of what needed to be further consolidated and what students particularly enjoyed or found difficult. Lessons are well organised and most move at a brisk pace. Teachers in most subjects mark students' work constructively, offering clear guidance on how they can improve, but marking is not always consistently regular in a small minority of subjects.

Standards of the majority of students' work, written and oral, are excellent and students can talk confidently about what they have learnt and can transfer their knowledge to other contexts.

Learning support assistants provide exceptional support to hearing-impaired students and to those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In a few instances those of lower ability would benefit from differently structured activities, better suited to helping their learning styles. Teachers use every opportunity to open students' minds to the world beyond the school. In one outstanding music lesson, for example, students were not only enthralled by learning African drumming, but were also motivated through this to learn about West African cultures.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets the needs of students exceptionally well, enabling them to make outstanding progress. Students have excellent opportunities to learn a good range of subjects, including modern foreign languages. Drama is a core element contributing noticeably to students' enjoyment, personal confidence and achievement and all students achieve the 'Preparation for Working Life' certificate. The introduction of a more practical ICT digital applications course has led to improved GCSE results in ICT. There is a good blend of academic and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11, with separate pathways, including vocational courses at the local college such as childcare, hairdressing and animal care, that prepare students effectively for the next stage of learning. There is a sound emphasis on the development of literacy skills in all lessons through a monthly Literacy Blitz. Effective specialist subject weeks in design and technology, mathematics and science raise the profile of these subjects. The local community has benefited from the school's technology status through the provision of free ICT training such as internet and digital photography courses. Excellent sharing of software and expertise in CAD/CAM has benefited local primaries and a local special school for students with severe disabilities. As a result of the school's specialist status students can study commercial catering and higher-attaining students have the opportunity to follow three sciences. While participation targets have not always been met because of past instability in staffing, recruitment into Year 12 now exceeds school targets in sciences, mathematics and design and technology.

A particular strength of the curriculum is the exemplary programme of out-of-classroom activities. Students benefit from the well-attended clubs, including sports, performing arts, ecology and astronomy. They also benefit from the rich programme of trips and visits that develop their understanding of the world around them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care and support given to all students, but especially the more vulnerable, are outstanding and contribute considerably to their achievement and enjoyment within the school. Transfer from primary schools is managed very effectively and staff quickly build up an in-depth understanding of individuals' different needs, especially in relation to assessment of students' basic skills in Year 7. Support for those students who have additional needs, including those with a hearing impairment, are a real strength and staff demonstrate a very high level of commitment to meeting their individual needs. As a result these students often achieve extremely well. Students who have experienced personal difficulties reported that 'staff always find time to talk to them' and 'teachers do not give up on us'. The Inclusion Centre works hard to reduce the number of exclusions from school and these are low. The school has effective links with a range of external agencies that further improve the quality of support. The link between high attendance and academic achievement is constantly reinforced during assemblies and tutor periods.

Students are set challenging targets and their progress is carefully tracked by achievement coordinators and subject departments. Progress is reviewed with students on academic tutoring days. Those at risk of underachieving become part of a 'focus group' and receive additional support through revision classes and coursework clubs. Parents are kept fully informed and encouraged to take an active part in their child's education and add comments in students' planners on homework and target grades. Both students and parents receive very good information and guidance on possible future career options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's leadership is outstanding as she has a clear vision and strong determination and has established a continuously improving ethos in a highly successful school. She is most ably supported by a dynamic and skilled team of managers whose focus is to continuously drive up students' achievements and standards throughout the school and the sixth form. They work very well as a cohesive team and there is effective sharing of good practice across subjects and departments.

The school's self-evaluation process is collaborative and rigorous, and provides an excellent account of the school's strengths and the areas where the school needs to improve. Departmental school improvement plans reflect this analytical approach, with a strong focus on raising achievement and standards. A robust performance management system that uses student performance data and information from lesson observations sustains good professional development for staff. However, the lesson observation process is sometimes too focused on teaching and does not always sufficiently analyse students' learning and progress in lessons.

Governance is excellent as governors are knowledgeable and fully involved through departmental reports and regular training in the school's relentless drive on raising achievement and standards. Additionally, they have a strong focus on sustainability through monitoring expenditure and have sought heat conservation and energy efficiencies. The school provides excellent value for money; it has successfully accelerated students' standards and still retained funds for the sixth form extension and arts centre build proposed this year to reduce restrictions in accommodation.

A particularly strong feature of the school's promotion of community cohesion is the evaluation and monitoring of its impact on the personal development of students.

Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school, especially appreciating the quality of education and care provided for their children. One parent reported, 'We would like to praise the governors, headteacher and teachers for the strong leadership, excellent drive to raise academic standards, solid pastoral support all underpinned by a strong culture and ethos. As a result our son feels valued and a regarded member of the school community which drives him to give of his best.'

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	-----------------------	--------------

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	1	
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	

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

15 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Darrick Wood School, Orpington, BR6 8ER

Following our recent visit to inspect your school, I am now writing to let you know about our findings. We would like to thank you for your contributions to the inspection. Thank you in particular to those who gave up time to talk to us. It was a pleasure meeting with you and listening to you talk about your best pieces of work that you presented to us in small groups.

Your school is an outstanding school. We enjoyed sitting in your lessons, and we were very impressed by your high levels of motivation and keen attitudes to learning, and observed that you enjoy your learning immensely. The learning environment that you work in is inspirational and we were delighted to see such imaginative works of art produced by you on display around the school.

Your behaviour is exemplary and we observed you to be respectful and polite young students in lessons and around the school. You are a credit to the school and to your local community. You informed us that you feel safe in the school, and benefit from the excellent choice of courses, as well as the wide range of extra-curricular activities the school has to offer such as sports, residential trips and reading buddies. You have made outstanding progress in your studies through your own hard work and the excellent teaching and support you receive from the school. Your teachers know you very well and plan lessons that encourage you to be active learners and the majority give you very good feedback on how to improve. As one of you reported, 'teachers make you work hard to achieve of your best!'

We have asked the school to help you to improve your results even more, through more regular marking of your written work across all the subjects and, in addition, when managers and teachers observe your lessons to check your learning and progress more closely.

We hope that all of you will do well and, with the help of the school, realise your future ambitions.

Yours faithfully

Meena Wood

Her Majesty's Inspector