



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report

ROBERT CLACK SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 101245

LEA: Barking and Dagenham

Inspection Dates: 23 – 24 June 2004
Reporting Inspector: Paul Armitage HMI

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was
deemed section 12 (3) under the same act

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INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Robert Clack School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by seven of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

Description of the school

Robert Clack is a large comprehensive school in Dagenham with 1656 learners, of whom 185 are in the sixth form. It is a popular, over-subscribed school. It serves an area where a high number of people live on low incomes. The percentage of learners known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average and is particularly high in the sixth form. The ethnic backgrounds of learners are diverse. Eighty-five per cent are white but many other groups are represented. The percentage of learners with special educational needs is average. The percentage of those whose first language is not English is higher than average. Learners' attainment on entry to the school has been below average. In recent years, it has been rising, although it still remains below average. The school became a specialist school for science in September 2003.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

This is a very good school. It is a place where young people from very different, and often deprived, backgrounds can come together to work in an atmosphere where they feel safe and where there is mutual respect, understanding and support. Learners enjoy their work and make very good progress – both academically and in their personal development. Examination results are good and, in addition, learners develop into confident young people making the most of the many opportunities they are given. The quality of leadership and management at all levels including the headteacher, senior managers, middle managers and the governors is very good. The head has a clear vision for the school as a whole and for staff and learners. He is inspiring and empowers them to achieve this vision. The school analyses its performance rigorously. It knows where it is most effective and where it needs to do better. It responds quickly to problems and issues. The judgements in this report match very closely the judgements made in the school's self-evaluation. The school manages its finances very wisely. It is very good value for money.

Grade: 1

Effectiveness of the school's sixth form

The quality of the sixth form is very good. It offers learners a good range of subjects and qualifications and therefore supports learners with a wide range of needs and abilities. Learners make very good progress, achieving good examination results. They share in the very good arrangements made for the personal development of young people at the school. The quality of the leadership and management of the sixth form is very good – for the same reasons as the main school. Likewise, the sixth form is very good value for money.

Grade: 1

Improvement since the last inspection

The previous inspection report pointed out that after a period of decline, the new headteacher had begun to turn things round. Standards had begun to improve as had teaching and the general ethos. Inspectors commented that the school was well placed to make further progress. This has proved to be the case. Standards have continued to rise substantially, attendance has improved and learners' personal development is now very good. Science school status has already had an important impact on the curriculum and is beginning to have positive effects elsewhere. All this amounts to significant improvement reflecting the continuing strength of leadership and management.

Grade: 1

Capacity to improve

The school has very effective management and efficient systems which it uses to monitor itself well. Management is always asking questions – particularly those linked to the further raising of academic and personal standards – and seeking responses that work. The school has a strong capacity to improve.

Grade: 1

What the school should do to improve further

To build on its successes, the school should:

- Make teaching even more sensitive to the wide range of learners' needs by addressing the refinements listed in the bullet points on page 5 of this report.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

Most learners make very good progress in the school.

During Years 7 to 9, learners' progress is good and by the end of Year 9 many are achieving average or above average standards in all subjects including English, mathematics and science.

GCSE results are very good. There has been a substantial increase in the percentage of learners achieving higher grade passes in the last seven years. This rate of improvement has accelerated in the last two years and is now above the national trend. Most learners make very good progress. In recent years, these high rates of progress have placed the school amongst the top performing schools in the country. The school has succeeded in closing the gender gap in attainment, so that boys now out-perform girls in a number of subjects in defiance of national trends. Ethnic minorities and looked-after learners do very well. Pupils with special educational needs, those who need additional support with their English, and those who are 'gifted and talented' progress well.

Sixth formers make very good progress and most attain average or above average A-levels and other results in a wide range of subjects.

Given the nature of the area that the school serves and the backgrounds of many of the young people at the school, these results represent a very considerable achievement for learners and staff.

Grade: 1

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Learners' personal development is very good.

Attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection and is continuing to do so. It is above the local average and just below the national average. The school has successful systems for dealing with attendance problems. Learners are punctual to lessons.

Learners behave very well in class and elsewhere in the school, which has excellent ways of managing their behaviour. It deals with problems quickly in fair, consistent, and positive ways. The reintegration into lessons of excluded learners and others with difficulties is very successful. The Learning Support Unit manages and supports this process very well.

Learners' attitudes to learning are very good. They show an interest in their work and they are keen to have a go and try things. They support one another very well. There is a lot of mutual trust and respect. The support that they get from staff raises expectations and celebrates success.

Learners' spiritual, moral and social development is very good. Their characters and personalities develop well in school and their confidence and determination are often very

striking. Nevertheless, they remain sensitive and aware and many are becoming politically astute. They also understand why there is sometimes a lack of agreement over values, can explain the reasons for this and give their own points of view. Learners are polite and mix well with their peers. Good relationships are a very strong feature. Shy learners develop confidence. Learners and staff from all backgrounds support and respect each other.

Learners' cultural development is very good. Learners have a good knowledge and understanding of the different cultures found in the Dagenham area as well as elsewhere in the country. This includes an understanding of the main features of different religions. They handle key aspects of world-wide culture such as the internet very well. Learners are encouraged to celebrate their own culture; for example, bi-lingual learners are encouraged to take GCSE examinations in their own languages and the school openly celebrates their achievement. There are many opportunities for learners to take part in cultural visits in the UK and abroad.

Learners' physical development is very good. They engage enthusiastically in activities and understand the need for a healthy lifestyle. Over half attend sports clubs and compete to a high standard against other schools. Their achievements are well celebrated with sports colours that they wear with pride. Learners understand the need for a healthy lifestyle and, in many cases, are developing a more discerning diet as they move through the school. They have a good understanding of sexual health issues.

Learners' participation in the community is very good. Strong links have been established with local businesses, senior citizens, youth organisations and other bodies. Local residents are quick to congratulate learners on their attitudes, actions and behaviour. A lot of successful fund raising takes place. A recent non-uniform day raised £2,000 for the British Heart Foundation.

Grade: 1

QUALITY OF PROVISION

The school judges rightly that the quality of the education it provides is very good.

Overall, the quality of teaching is good with many very positive features but also some areas where improvement is desirable if standards are to rise even further.

The good quality of teaching has been responsible for the significant raising of standards since the last inspection. The school's standard lesson model (known as the 'Robert Clack Good Lesson') ensures that most lessons have clear objectives, are well-structured and result in effective learning. Behaviour in class is very well managed, and learners are attentive and work well together. They work confidently on the tasks they are given and are willing to learn in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and respect for both their teachers and peers. Learners usually talk confidently when directly questioned. Homework is set consistently and extends and consolidates learning. Learners are also very clear on their targets in terms of grades and levels. Teaching assistants are used effectively and their support is valued by learners.

Learning support assistants offer special needs learners very good support, both in class and out of lessons during lunch breaks and after school. Gifted and talented learners are given opportunities to develop greater confidence in their abilities. Learners with special needs are well motivated and learn well, particularly when given the opportunity to work in pairs and small groups with work that is well matched to their needs. Individual learning plans are well used by support tutors and learners to set targets. Learners' performances against the targets are closely monitored.

Teachers work very hard to provide many opportunities for learners outside the formal curriculum, for example, in sport, community and cultural activities, and in additional classes to support learners with their academic work. The quality of this teaching is very good.

The teaching based on the school's good lesson model has served both teachers and learners well. It has been a solid foundation on which the school has built its success. But if the school is to improve still further, refinements are required which will make the teaching even more sensitive to learners' needs and which will put greater onus on learners to take even more responsibility for their learning. Refinements include improving:

- how teachers assess learners' knowledge and understanding and how they use this information to inform their teaching
- the marking of learners' work so that learners know more precisely what they have to do to improve
- the range of teaching methods so that greater responsibility is placed on learners to focus clearly on how to improve. This includes the development of more independent learning, group work and opportunities for learners to seek clarification if they are unsure
- the correction of poor grammar and spelling, especially in Key Stage 3, and the emphasis placed on the development of learners' speaking and writing so as to develop literacy skills further
- the work given to groups of pupils such as those with special educational needs, the 'gifted and talented' and those whose first language is not English so that their needs are met even more precisely.

The school has already begun to identify how to improve teaching further, for example, in the promising developments now taking place in science and history.

The school's curriculum is very good. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 covers the main subjects well. In Key Stage 4, all learners take a number of compulsory subjects as well as options chosen from a good range on offer. Some of these are vocational and work-related and are well suited to learners' needs. Specialist science status has enabled the school to offer an extended range of science options, including separate sciences as well as two different double award courses.

Curriculum choice in the sixth form is wide. Arrangements made with other schools enable learners to choose from a wide range of academic courses and a growing range of vocational options. The small number of courses at intermediate and foundation levels meets demand and opens up possibilities for learners without the qualifications to take A-levels.

There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school supports learners who pursue interests outside the mainstream curriculum, some of whom have achieved a high level of skill – for example, in gymnastics, rugby, cricket and skiing.

The school currently fails to meet statutory requirements for religious education in Key Stage 4, the daily act of collective worship and National Curriculum citizenship in both key stages. However, the issues are being addressed, for example, by the appointment of more specialist staff in September 2004.

The school cares for its learners very well. The health, safety and well-being of learners are paramount for all staff. They understand their learners' needs and respond very quickly when help is needed.

There is a wide range of very good support – for example, the work of learning mentors in the upper school aimed at improving attendance, preventing disaffection and remedying underachievement. This initiative could usefully be extended to Key Stage 3. Unstinting efforts are made to establish and maintain good links with parents and carers with whom there are very good communications. Reports on learners' progress are clear and helpful. There are also excellent links with external agencies to ensure that learners are well supported. Looked-after learners are very well supported and they understand where they can get help and guidance when needed. Child protection arrangements are secure and learners feel safe and confident in all stages of the school. As they move through the school, they receive very good guidance as to next steps and feel confident as they prepare for the worlds of further and higher education or work.

Grade: 1

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The evidence from this inspection confirms the school's own judgement that leadership and management are very good. The headteacher articulates a clear and ambitious vision for the school based on fostering learner's talents and achieving high academic and personal standards. This vision is shared by governors and staff at all levels and is understood and supported by parents and learners who express great pride in the school's achievements.

Management at all levels, including the sixth form, is very good. Strategic planning at departmental level dovetails well with development planning at higher levels. Financial management is prudent. The school directs spending towards the priorities it has identified. Strong management systems underpin effective practice across the school. Policies are well defined and are implemented efficiently. For example, responsibilities for staff development or for putting together the specialist science school bid are delegated appropriately. Staff work hard and value the opportunities that additional responsibilities provide. Lines of accountability are clear. Middle managers are expected to explain the results from their departments and, in turn, to question subject teachers about their practice. Good practice is recognised and rewarded. Team work is a strength and morale is high.

Governors are active and highly supportive. They are important 'critical friends' to senior managers and other staff.

The school's analysis of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate. Quality assurance is well established and based on formal and informal monitoring. The school's procedures for checking on the quality of the teaching are thorough and wide-ranging, and are linked, appropriately, to the formal system of performance management. Staff report that they find the process valuable, although some targets set for teachers lack the clarity and detail to be really helpful.

The quality of communication within the school is a strength - a considerable achievement for such a large organisation on a split site.

Grade: 1

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