

Sandringham School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117548
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326644
Inspection dates	3 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Lynne Blakelock

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1203
Sixth form	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lin Keen
Headteacher	Alan Gray
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 October 2005
School address	The Ridgeway St Albans Hertfordshire AL4 9NX
Telephone number	01727 759240
Fax number	01727 759242

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the provision for information and communications technology (ICT) throughout the school and its effectiveness in lessons as both a teaching tool and in raising standards; the extent and impact of assessment practices in raising achievement throughout the school and the impact of the sixth form consortium on the quality of education provided.

Evidence was gathered from observing work in classrooms, scrutinising school documentation, records of achievement and progress, and parental questionnaires. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders and with students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average comprehensive school, with a large and growing sixth form. The school, which is popular and over-subscribed, is situated in an area of relative social and economic advantage to the north of the city. Students start the school with standards that are generally a little above average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or a statement of special educational needs is below average. The majority of students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. The school, which was first awarded specialist arts status in 2003, was re-designated as a specialist arts school in 2007. It was awarded a second subject specialism in science in April 2008 as a High Performing Specialist School. It was awarded International School status in July 2008. It offers both traditional A levels and the International Baccalaureate in the sixth form. The sixth form is part of a consortium through its partnership with Beaumont and Verulam, two other local schools. Separate inspection teams coordinated by HMI inspected all three schools and their respective sixth forms simultaneously.

The school is a Leading Edge school in recognition of its good practice. It is an accredited initial teacher training provider and supports the training of graduate teachers. The school also provides effective assistance to local schools that are facing challenging circumstances. The school achieved Sportsmark and its third Artsmark Gold award in 2008. It has achieved the Hertfordshire Self Evaluation Accreditation award and attained the Financial Management Standards in Schools. Extended Services provision for students and the community was graded as outstanding in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstandingly effective school, in which students attain high standards and make excellent progress. It prepares them exceptionally well for the next stages of their life. The school has made excellent progress since the last inspection, including in the development of its specialist arts status. The school's involvement with the community is exceptional in the quality of its partnership work. The curriculum throughout the school is a significant strength in its diverse and often imaginative provision, which has made the school a place of real relevance and enjoyment for its students. Parents overwhelmingly agree. One parent described it as 'a school where every child really does matter and the best is brought out of them.'

The outstanding leadership and management of the school, and especially that of the headteacher, have been the catalyst in the excellent all-round education of students. The headteacher is highly respected by students, staff and parents. His very clear vision for the school is shared and supported by the very effective senior team and by committed staff who, students say, work very hard for them. Thorough and rigorous planning combined with robust monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance in all areas, contributes to the school's outstanding capacity to improve. Specialist arts school status, which is led very well by an assistant headteacher, has strengthened teaching and learning opportunities and provision across the school, to the benefit of students. It has also made a significant contribution to the excellent community cohesion which has been extended into families and the local and wider community through innovative arts projects. The awarding of both international and science status are further extending learning opportunities. Governors oversee the school's work very efficiently, with a clear focus on monitoring, as this innovative school continues to extend and strengthen its provision.

The excellent curriculum, which is very broad, caters for the needs, aspirations and interests of all students particularly well. Hand in hand with subject learning is preparation for life, both within subjects and as part of a discrete programme for all year groups. This includes enterprise activities from Year 7, along with the teaching of learning and leadership skills. Arts subjects are very well represented throughout the school, contributing to students' excellent personal development and encouraging their creative abilities. An example of the school's excellent impact on community cohesion is through the arts, which supports many adult learners and primary school children, broadening their life experiences. The tailoring of the curriculum for individual needs means that students can proceed at the right pace for them, with more able students starting GCSE courses a year early and those who find learning difficult having access to further English, mathematics and science lessons. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has developed significantly since the last inspection in the range of courses and the levels at which they can be studied. GCSE and BTEC courses run alongside Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network (ASDAN) courses, which strengthen practical skills, and a flexible work-related programme. A fantastic programme of extended services is provided, such as out of lesson activities, homework sessions, extended learning days and the three days each year when students can choose enrichment activities. They are the backbone of students' development into adults who have the skills to cope with the responsibilities of life.

Standards are exceptionally high at key stages 3 and 4 for both boys and girls, and are improving year on year. Mathematics is particularly strong throughout the school. Most students meet or exceed their targets in the subjects that they study. Specialist school targets are also met at both key stages. The school's data currently points to further improvement next year. Key factors to the students' success is the outstanding quality of teaching and learning and the high quality academic guidance that they receive, which lead to students making excellent progress from their starting points. Students enjoy learning and are motivated by relevant and interesting tasks, which suit very well their individual needs. Excellent working relationships between students and staff and teachers' strong subject knowledge, result in a very positive learning environment. Students are trained to lead and end lessons for themselves, adding to their interest in learning. Assessment of each others' work forms an integral part of students' learning, together with careful questioning which is an established feature of many lessons. Such strategies challenge students' thinking and quicken their progress. Students know their targets and examples of some excellent assessment practices, including marking, were seen during the inspection. The excellent tracking of their progress ensures that students who fall behind in their learning receive extra support promptly. The provision and teaching of ICT are very effective in promoting learning, enjoyment and progress. Lessons are strengthened through very appropriate homework, which students expect, take seriously and which extends classroom learning.

Students' personal development is outstanding. The school does a wonderful job in ensuring that its initiatives allow for the broadest development opportunities. Students have a genuine voice in the school through the effective school council and are able to make a positive difference to their learning and social environment. The school council's overhaul of the behaviour policy into a rewards and consequences system has transformed behaviour and encouraged a strong moral code. Students respond to the challenging and diverse opportunities to be part of teams and to be leaders, both within school and in the local community. They have a myriad of opportunities to participate in enterprise activities, often through the house system, thus adding to their excellent capacity for their future economic well-being. They include fund raising, a weekly lunch club for the elderly and a drama workshop tour. Unsurprisingly, students enjoy school greatly, get on very well with each other and support each other at work and play. Their attendance is excellent. Students enthusiastically adopt healthy eating choices and keep healthy and fit through physical education (PE) and out of school clubs. Their spiritual, moral and social development is excellent. Students' cultural development is sophisticated, with a variety of contacts and learning opportunities in other countries, reflecting the school's international status. Students know how to keep safe. A Year 8 'Girl Bullying' programme, for example, ensures that students know how to deal with undesirable situations in a school that has a zero tolerance of any unkind behaviour.

Nothing is left to chance in this school, which is reflected in the exceptional care, guidance and support of students. A discrete learning area for Year 7 speeds up the settling-in process and transition of students from Key Stage 2; post-16 induction is detailed and personalised. The school has all required procedures in place to help ensure the health, safety and well-being of students, both in school and on visits. Its close and effective relationships with outside agencies enable students to access specific help with personal, social or emotional problems. This adds more to the

staff's own sensitive initiatives, which are very effective in solving students' individual problems. Students speak highly of the care and interest that staff show in them, both as young people and learners, which is significant in their enjoyment of their education.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides an effective education. In 2008, all students attained grades between A to E at the end of Year 13 and a growing number achieved A to B grades. The results show an upward trend and reflect the good progress and above average standards that many achieve. Students enjoy their lessons because the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and offer a wide variety of teaching strategies, which result in good independent learning. The best lessons provide brisk pace and effective questioning to help students develop higher-order thinking skills. In some lessons, the match of learning activities to needs is not always as accurate as it could be, in promoting faster progress.

There are significant strengths in the care, guidance and support of students, leading to their outstanding personal development. Students have good relationships with staff, who readily provide extra help and tuition. Progress is regularly and rigorously monitored and weaknesses addressed promptly. Students know their targets and their on-going level of achievement. Sixth formers are wonderful role models for younger students, through their responsibilities in the school, the day-to-day support that they give to younger students and their involvement in community activities.

The sixth form is well led and managed, including the consortium arrangements. The excellent curriculum offers a rich variety of personalised courses, including A Levels and vocational courses, as well as the International Baccalaureate that is promoting students' thinking and critical skills well. A one year transition course is successful in preparing students for A level courses. This results in an inclusive sixth form community that values all of its members. Students participate in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities with many guiding the younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that learning strategies in the sixth form match the needs of students more closely, in order to help accelerate progress and raise standards further.

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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?	1	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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

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

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	
How well 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	

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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	2
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	2
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	2
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	



4 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Sandringham School, St Albans, AL4 9NX

I am writing to inform you of the judgements we made when we inspected your school recently. Thank you for your help during that day. We enjoyed observing your lessons and having discussions with you. The perceptions that you shared with us about your school were very helpful to us in gaining an understanding of the education that you receive.

Your school is outstanding and is led exceptionally well by your headteacher. He makes sure that everything in the school is of very high quality and is always looking to make it even better for you. For example, the staff, who also do a great job, give you a genuine voice in making decisions about the future development of your school. You are prepared very well for adulthood, with many chances to take responsibilities and to organise and run activities, both in the school and sixth form. We were particularly impressed that you are taking a leading role in lessons by starting and finishing them.

You make excellent progress and reach high standards. This is because teaching is regularly outstanding and you receive excellent care, support and guidance in your work and in your development as young adults. Sixth formers make good progress and benefit well from the joint teaching arrangements. You all show an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles, which you increasingly adopt. The curriculum serves you very well and makes sure that your individual learning needs are met, because the range of subjects is broad. You are put in groups and courses that enable you to make the progress of which you are capable. You are all benefiting from arts school status, both in the accommodation and the activities that are available. Your involvement in the community is not only helping you and the people with whom you work, but is bringing the school and community closely together. Your school is a busy and happy place, which you and your parents are proud that you attend. Unsurprisingly, your attendance is excellent. We hope that you will continue to take full advantage of all the opportunities that you are given.

Best wishes for the future.

Lynne Blakelock
Lead inspector