

Sir William Ramsay School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137256
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	3097457
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2012
Lead inspector	Bill Stoneham

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	999
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Griffiths (chairman elect)
Headteacher	Gaynor Comber
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 March 2009
School address	Rose Avenue Hazlemere High Wycombe HP15 7UB
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Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	3–4 July 2012
Inspection number	397457



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Introduction

Inspection team

Bill Stoneham	Additional inspector
Kanwiljit Kaur-Singh	Additional inspector
Helen Bailey	Additional inspector
Kevin Harrison	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Forty lessons were observed, featuring forty different teachers. Discussions were held with members of the governing body, students, the headteacher, and senior and middle managers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at students' work. In addition, questionnaire responses from 181 parents and carers, 36 staff and 114 students were analysed and their views taken into account.

Information about the school

Sir William Ramsay School is an average-sized secondary school serving High Wycombe and the surrounding area. The majority of students are from a White British background, with about a third from minority ethnic groups. An above-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students identified as having disabilities and with special educational needs is close to the national average, and so is the proportion supported on school action plus and with a statement of special educational needs. The school operates two specialist units. One is for hearing impaired students; the second is for students with physical disabilities. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school meets the current floor standard set by the government, which determines the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. The school became an academy in August 2011.

At the time of the inspection Year 11 and Year 13 students were on study leave. Sample sixth form lessons were being conducted for Year 11 students.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school that offers all students a good education. The conversion to academy status has been managed well and there is already a strong positive impact. A well-planned curriculum and many opportunities for students to show responsibility contribute significantly to the good outcomes. The school is not outstanding because inconsistencies in teaching mean that students' achievement is not yet at the highest level.
- The sixth form is good and has improved since the previous inspection. The students' good outcomes can, in part, be attributed to improved tracking and monitoring systems that have enhanced the advice and guidance they are offered.
- The achievement for most groups, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, is good. The achievements of hearing impaired students are outstanding because of the high quality and sensitive support they are given.
- Students' good progress is due to good teaching. Most lessons are sharply planned to provide a variety of well-targeted activities meeting most students' needs well. Occasionally, higher-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently. Teachers' use of assessment, especially at the end of lessons, and in written marking, is of variable quality.
- Behaviour and safety are good and students feel safe in school. They have good attitudes to learning and respond consistently well and with interest to their lessons. The learning environment is happy and harmonious.
- The headteacher provides clear and purposeful leadership and has developed leadership and management well throughout the school. The governing body provides strong support and challenge. Self-evaluation is purposeful and contributes well to improvements. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection because of the thorough checks on performance that are in place and the commitment to the professional development of staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Raise achievement by eliminating inconsistencies in teaching and improving it further, by January 2013, by ensuring that:
 - higher attaining students are consistently challenged in every lesson
 - all marking and assessment meet the standard of the best, offering clear guidance to students as to how to improve
 - more effective use is made of plenary sessions, especially at the end of lessons, to enable students to discuss, evaluate and peer-assess their learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

From starting points that are mostly below average, students make at least good progress and reach standards by the end of Years 11 and 13 that are broadly average. This includes disabled students, including those with physical disabilities, those who have special educational needs, those who speak English as an additional language and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. For some students, particularly hearing impaired students, achievement is outstanding.

Where gaps in the performance of different groups persist, they are closing. Evidence from classroom observations confirms that in many subjects, and especially English and mathematics, standards are improving well. Students develop basic skills in literacy and numeracy, not only in subject specific lessons but also through a range of other subjects. For instance, they develop literacy skills through the many opportunities to write, in history for example, and develop their understanding of grammatical structures by comparing how English usage differs from modern foreign languages. Sensitive curriculum innovation also contributes effectively to these improving outcomes. Vocational options in subjects such as beauty therapy have seen good improvements in achievement.

Typically, in lessons, students in all years make at least good progress. In some, the gains made are outstanding. For example, in a Year 8 Spanish lesson students made rapid progress because of the innovative range of activities deployed by the teacher. Careful planning for learning ensured all were engaged and enthused with a strong emphasis on speaking Spanish frequently and accurately, reinforcing similarities and differences between English and Spanish language structures. The achievement of Key Stage 4 beauty therapy students is outstanding because their lessons are appropriately set in a vocational context. Students run and manage their own salon and have to meet exacting standards of treatment, health and safety and record keeping. The outcomes are highly professional. Hearing impaired students make outstanding progress because of the high-quality, well-targeted support provided. Much is done to raise their self-esteem and they are very successfully encouraged to become independent learners.

Most parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire believe their

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child is making good progress. Inspection evidence supports this view. In those few lessons where progress is not as marked, it is because the needs of different students, particularly higher attainers, are not planned for sufficiently well, with too few opportunities for them to reflect on, and discuss, their progress.

Quality of teaching

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Most lessons observed were taught well, with a significant minority where teaching was of high quality. In the small minority of lessons where teaching was less effective, it is because planning for the needs of different groups, especially higher attainers, lacked challenge. Also, plenary sessions, especially at the end of lessons, were rushed and offered too little time for students to reflect on, and assess, their learning. Marking is inconsistent. The best marking contributes well to students' progress by helping them to improve. Occasionally, marking is less constructive and provides little information about the strengths of the work, or what could be done better.

The good teaching underpins the students' good overall progress. This includes students who speak English as an additional language, and sixth formers. Careful diagnosis of need and regular checks on learning enable disabled pupils and those with special educational needs to make good progress. Hearing impaired students are well integrated into mainstream lessons and given excellent support from specialist staff with high levels of expertise and understanding of the students' particular needs. This is why students in this group make exceptional progress.

Many strengths of teaching are identifiable. In the most effective lessons planning for learning is very effective and all students are challenged by good questioning techniques. Numeracy skills are promoted well. Teachers encourage students' literacy through many opportunities for reading, writing, speaking and listening and presentations. Those students heard reading did so with confidence, fluency and expression. Students benefit from teachers' strong subject knowledge. Working relationships are invariably good. Learning is further promoted by staff who are willing to take calculated risks in their teaching. This was evident, for example, in a Year 12 psychology lesson. Students had to consider research ethics and whether the techniques used by some researchers were morally defensible. In many lessons independence is fostered well and progress is at least good because students learn by doing and researching for themselves rather than simply being told.

Well-planned lessons, that involve challenging activities and encourage thought and analysis successfully, promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In many lessons team work, independence and responsibility are successfully promoted and the well-planned curriculum makes a positive impact, helping to ensure lessons are engaging and interesting.

In the inspection questionnaire most parents and carers indicated that they believe their child is taught well. Inspection evidence supports this view. One parent commented, 'My child started at the school underperforming and lacking in

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confidence. She is about to leave Year 11 expected to gain well above average grades. Her teaching staff have been brilliant!

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is invariably good and records show this is typical over time. Students act responsibly and seldom require little more than gentle reminders from staff to behave well. Exemplary care arrangements, especially for the group of students with physical disabilities and for hearing impaired students, combined with good relationships and mutual respect, ensure that students feel safe in school and know that adults in school will help them if they have a problem.

The view that behaviour is good is shared by most parents and carers responding to the questionnaire, but a small minority felt that lessons are disrupted by inappropriate behaviour; a view stated by a minority of students. Inspection evidence did not support this view. Most students said that disruption seldom occurs, adding that most teachers deal effectively with any challenging behaviour. During the inspection, lessons proceeded in an orderly manner and no time was lost due to poor behaviour. Students have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying; they say that bullying is rare and that if it is reported, it will be dealt with effectively. This enables them to feel safe in school. The proportion of students who are excluded from school for behaviour issues is declining at a good rate. In part, this is because of the work done in The Zone, a unit that has been established for students who are failing to conform to expectations. Time there gives them an opportunity to reflect on their conduct and undertake their studies outside their normal classrooms. Evidence offered by the school indicates that The Zone is helping to improve behaviour further.

Most students, including those in the sixth form, attend school regularly and are punctual. The school has effective systems to challenge and support students who do not attend and attendance is improving.

Most students demonstrate a good understanding of how to avoid the main risks that they might face. For example, students were clear about potential hazards from cyber-bullying, the use of social networking sites and substance abuse. Inspection evidence confirmed the view of almost all the parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire that their children are looked after well and feel safe in school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher demonstrates a high level of commitment to improving the achievement of all students. She has ensured, with the help of the good senior team and a highly committed staff, that the school has a clear direction and ambition for excellence. Staff feel that there is a real sense of teamwork throughout the school. They understand the goals and feel supported in their professional development. Self-evaluation is accurate and shows that the school has a clear view of its strengths

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and areas for development and understands its priorities well. The school has improved the use of data to track and monitor students' progress significantly since the last inspection. This improvement, coupled with the well-focused management of teaching and learning, has greatly contributed to improved outcomes for all students, including those in the sixth form, and demonstrates the school's continuing capacity to improve further.

The curriculum has improved, providing students with a wide range of experiences in a strong moral framework. Innovative ideas, such as students working in the school café, have done much to increase responsibility and self-esteem. While curriculum planning takes the needs of all students fully into account, a few lessons sometimes do not provide enough challenge for more-able students. However, the curriculum promotes students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development well. Partnerships with schools in Sweden and Turkey and with a national art institution further strengthen this provision.

The governing body has a clear and strategic approach to monitoring the school's work. It has kept a successful strong focus on maintaining students' progress levels during the conversion to becoming an academy. Governors have links with subject departments and they support and challenge the school's leaders effectively. Safeguarding arrangements meet the national requirements. The good and better progress evident among all groups of students indicates that leaders promote equality and tackle discrimination effectively.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



6 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir William Ramsay School, High Wycombe HP15 7UB

My colleagues and I thoroughly enjoyed our recent visit. We enjoyed talking to you, learning about your views and seeing you in lessons. Thank you for your responses to the questionnaire. You told us that the school is good. We agree with you, it is providing a good level of education.

We were pleased with many of the things we saw and that you told us about. Much of the teaching you receive is good, with some that is outstanding. Your staff are keen for you to do well and work hard on your behalf. To make the school even better, we have asked the school to eliminate the inconsistencies in teaching. To do this we have asked senior staff to ensure that:

- higher attaining students are consistently and appropriately challenged in every lesson
- marking and assessment from all teachers are to the standard of the best
- more effective use is made of plenary sessions, especially at the end of lessons, to enable you to discuss, evaluate and peer-assess your learning.

We liked the extent to which you contribute to school life and were impressed by the many opportunities you have to exercise responsibility, including serving in the school café and beauty therapy students running their own salon. Other things that impressed us were your keenness in lessons, your improving attendance and your good behaviour. By maintaining and building on these standards, you can contribute to the improvements we have suggested.

Thank you for making our visit so enjoyable.

Yours sincerely

Bill Stoneham
Lead inspector

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