

St Laurence School

Ashley Road, Bradford-on-Avon, BA15 1DZ

Inspection dates

7–8 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school prides itself on offering a wide range of courses and many varied additional opportunities that appeal to its students.
- Most teaching is good or better, and so the majority of student make good progress and achieve GCSE results which are better than average.
- A particularly high proportion of students gain A* or A grades in GCSE English and mathematics.
- Relationships throughout the school are strong and further enhanced by the tutor group system, with groups including students of all different ages from across the school.
- Students behave well and feel very safe in school.
- The students are offered an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. There are opportunities and experiences in sports, performing arts, visits abroad, residential visits and many other chances for wide participation.
- Leadership and management, including that of the new headteacher, are good. All leaders are determined to set the highest expectations for students, so that achievement will be raised further. The governing body provides high quality support for the school's leadership team and sets appropriate challenges for the school.
- The sixth form is good. Examination results are above average and improving so that the vast majority of students are able to progress to their chosen pathways.
- The curriculum is broad and varied. The wide range of courses provides all students with opportunities to gain appropriate qualifications.
- The on-site Wiltshire Music Centre provides an excellent facility for the school, and also an asset for community use. It helps to maintain the close links that the school has with the community.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding so students are not yet making consistently rapid progress, in particular by becoming more independent learners.
- The school is still developing its strategies to ensure that the small minority of students who do not make consistently good progress achieve as well as their peers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 33 lessons, three of which were observed jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors made several short visits to lessons and to extra-curricular activities.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body, staff and groups of students.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, attended assemblies and looked at samples of students' work. They also looked at progress data, documents about school development and evaluation, safeguarding information and records about attendance and behaviour. The records showing the impact of professional development for staff were also examined.
- The views of parents as expressed in the online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account, as were the responses made by staff in questionnaires completed at the beginning of the inspection.

Inspection team

Ann Cox, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Justine Hocking	Additional inspector
Steve Nelson	Additional inspector
Joanna Pike	Additional inspector
Robert Smith	Additional inspector
Phil Taylor	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Laurence is larger than the average-sized secondary school, with a sixth form, and serves the town of Bradford-on-Avon and the surrounding area.
- The headteacher took up his post a few weeks before this inspection following the retirement of the previous headteacher.
- Almost all students are White British and very few have English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding, is well below the national average.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs who are supported at school action is well below the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average.
- A small number of students in Key Stage 4 attend vocational (work-related) courses at local colleges in Chippenham, Bath, Trowbridge and Lackham, and also at Springfields Academy.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- St Laurence School converted to an academy on 1 August 2011. When its predecessor school, also known as St Laurence School, was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2010 it was judged to be a good school overall.
- The school and its predecessor school have held performing arts specialist status since 2000.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding so that all students make even faster progress by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan more opportunities for students to work independently and take charge of their own learning
 - use data about students more consistently so that lesson activities provide challenge and pace
 - mark and assess work thoroughly in every subject and give students clear advice about what they need to do next in order to improve.
- Focus on monitoring the achievement of the few students who are at risk of falling behind so that they can be helped to make similar progress to their peers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with standards in English and mathematics which are above the national average for Key Stage 2. At the end of Key Stage 4, GCSE results were above the national average in 2012.
- The proportions of students gaining the highest GCSE grades of A* or A in English and mathematics in 2012 were well above the national average. This reflects the rapid progress made by the most able students.
- Given their starting points the majority of students make progress in English and mathematics which compares well to national average. However, in 2012, a small minority of students including some with special educational needs or with lower starting points, did not make as much progress as they could. The school is developing better ways to check the progress of all students and is providing more targeted catch-up help so that no students fall behind. Teachers and teaching assistants support students with statements of special educational needs effectively so that they make good progress and achieve well.
- The progress data for students currently in Year 11 indicate that they should achieve at higher levels than last year.
- The provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs is being strengthened and currently these students are making progress in English which is close to that of other groups. Their progress in mathematics and science is not yet as good.
- A small proportion of students are entitled to additional help funded by the pupil premium. The school has used this funding in a variety of ways such as ensuring that students can participate in additional activities and that all have revision guides. Recent examination results show that this group of students does not perform as well as other students, as measured by average points scores, mirroring the position for this group seen nationally. The school is looking carefully at ways to help these students in lessons and replicate the good practice that is already seen in some humanities lessons, where gaps in achievement between this group and their peers are closing.
- Good attention is given to allowing students to develop their literacy skills, and students develop into confident readers. They are encouraged to read widely by the 'Readathon' challenge. The development of writing, communication and mathematical skills is good.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations. These are taken at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and improving. The number of students joining the sixth form is growing, reflecting the inclusive nature of the school. The school has been proactive in adapting its provision, including individual support, to allow all students to be successful. A consistently large majority of sixth form students progress to university education. The results for the current Year 13 students at the end of last year indicate that the A-level outcomes for next year will be better still.
- The school's specialist status as a performing arts school is endorsed by Artsmark Gold Award (2012) and reflected in high quality performances, including, in the week of the inspection, a very popular musical production. Students also gain consistently high-grade outcomes in GCSE music and drama. The on-site shared facility of the Wiltshire Music Centre is a valuable asset for the school.
- There are a small proportion of students in Key Stage 4 who receive vocational (work-related) training at other centres during a part of the week, and this ensures that they leave school with appropriate qualifications and experience, such as those in hairdressing and catering.

The quality of teaching is good

- Evidence shows that the quality of teaching since the school converted to an academy is good. Most of the teaching observed during the inspection was good or outstanding, and this observation is in line with the school's own monitoring records. Some outstanding teaching was seen across different subjects and in different year groups.
- Teachers and other adults who support learning take trouble to make the activities interesting for students. They promote positive learning relationships so that students feel comfortable and are happy to participate in activities. Where teaching is outstanding, the teachers are careful to ask students questions in order to prompt them and allow them to think for themselves. Students also gain a lot when they can work with other students to plan and discuss their work, and lessons which included these types of activity are very effective. This encourages students to be independent learners and usually results in the students making rapid progress. The school is aware that it needs to encourage all teachers to be confident to allow the students to be more independent instead of working more passively to teacher direction.
- All teachers have high expectations of their students. In the best lessons there is a brief recap of previous learning and then new activities to build on this. Students are encouraged to make an attempt at challenging tasks, and are not put off by being afraid to make errors. In some sixth form lessons, inspectors saw that work completed by students between lessons enabled them to pinpoint things which they needed more help with, also allowing them to be well prepared for the next stage of learning.
- Although teachers look at students' work regularly, there was variation in the standard of marking and assessment across the school. When marking and assessment are most helpful there is an indication to students about how well they have completed a task, but also advice about what they need to do next and how this can be achieved. In the best examples there was clear evidence that the students had taken this advice and made the improvements needed to make further progress.
- The school has good systems to record information about students and their progress, but not all teachers use this information effectively to plan activities that allow all students to make good progress, and ensure that those in danger of falling behind are helped to catch up. In geography lessons inspectors noticed that there was particularly good help for students entitled to support through the pupil premium.
- The school is strongly committed to improving teaching in all areas. The recent sixth form learning review has focused sharply on further improving the quality of teaching to ensure that the improvements in outcomes continue.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy their school experience. They are very well mannered towards each other and to staff and visitors at the school. Students are positive about the 'vertical' tutor system, in which they are grouped with students of different ages across the school, and say that it contributes positively towards promoting harmonious behaviour.
- Although students' attitudes to lessons are good, they are sometimes passive in their approach, simply following the direction of their teachers instead of taking more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers do not always give students enough opportunities to be independent and self-determining to promote better habits for study.
- In just a very few lessons some lower-ability students lost focus, but this was also when the lesson was not sufficiently interesting for them.
- Attendance is good, comparing favourably to the national average. In the past the attendance of some groups of students has not been so good, and the school has focused particular staff on improving this. There is positive evidence of the impact this has had in the current school year.

- There are very few instances of bullying reported in the school. On the rare occasions when there is an issue, the school deals with it swiftly and effectively. Students report that they have complete confidence in the school to deal with any matters which are reported. Parents also have this same confidence in the school, as indicated in the school's own surveys and the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire.
- The school takes active steps to ensure that antisocial behaviour and unnecessary risks are minimised. Anti-bullying focus days and regular updates to students and their families about minimising cyber-safety risks are a regular feature. Students are sensitive about issues such as racism and homophobic bullying and they have a good understanding of potential hazards such as alcohol or substance abuse.
- Instances of poor behaviour reported in the school's log show that there is a trend of decreasing numbers of exclusions, which indicates improvements in behaviour.
- The school has an exemplary system for tracking the personal development experiences of every student, and this enables it to ensure comprehensive coverage of all aspects relating to each student's development.
- At certain times each week when some students attend vocational (work-related courses) at local providers the school carefully checks their attendance, behaviour and safety to ensure that these are good.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher is very ably supported by senior managers and other key staff, who all are determined to see the school's students achieve the best results possible. All school leaders and the governing body have high expectations and ambitions that are shared by all staff in the school.
- Leadership is being effectively shared across the school. Teachers in charge of subjects are taking an increased responsibility for evaluating and developing teaching and learning within the areas that they are responsible for.
- The school has the highest expectations of all staff and because of this, teachers' classroom practice is improving. There is systematic monitoring of teaching by subject leaders and senior staff, together with provision for further staff training and development, linked to these rigorous observations. As a result, teaching is improving across the school. Where joint observations were undertaken by inspectors and senior staff there was very close agreement about the quality of teaching observed.
- Under the leadership of the new headteacher, and because the previous self-evaluation cycle is coming to an end, the school is currently undertaking a detailed review. Senior leaders have a thorough and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are using this information to plan for future.
- The school's curriculum provides a broad and balanced range of learning opportunities for all students. In order to ensure that there is appropriate provision for all students, arrangements are made for some students in Key Stage 4 to attend training off site and gain vocational (work-related) qualifications. The school and its governors are determined to continue to provide a wide range of subjects for students to study in the sixth form.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all students is a strength of the school. There are regular assemblies addressing spiritual development and there are close links with the diocese of Salisbury. The arrangement of the school into 'vertical' tutor groups allows sixth form students to give practical help to younger students. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities available to students, with events ranging from visits to the theatre and residential stays in activity centres, through to visiting countries across the world, as part of a long-established practice. The school takes steps to ensure that these trips are open to all students who meet the personal criteria to participate and so the access is fully inclusive.
- The school works hard to include all parents and members of the community in its work. It tries

to ensure that all parents have access to contact the school and promotes contact through social activities in addition to those directly related to students' progress.

- The school has in place robust systems to ensure that all statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.
- Since becoming an academy the work of the school is monitored by Dual Foundation Trust of the Church of England, Diocese of Salisbury and the Fitzmaurice Foundation, who are represented on the governing body.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body brings a wide range of professional expertise and expert knowledge to the school and is able to support and challenge the school's leaders extremely well. Members of the governing body undertake regular training, and when necessary they make use of the services of independent consultants in order to ensure that they are able to hold the school to account on all matters. Governors have very good links with parents and other community members and make suitable efforts to communicate with parents and the local community as a whole. They are well informed about the performance of students, receiving plentiful data and analyses from the school's staff, and also using data analyses produced by the government. The governing body is well acquainted with the performance of the school's students and groups of students against national indicators.

The governing body has a very clear awareness of the standards of teaching across the school and has an overview of the arrangements and outcomes of performance management. They have supported the school's action in ensuring that teachers' salary progression is linked to the progress of their students.

The governing body is extremely prudent in monitoring the spending of all the funding available to the school, including the pupil premium fund.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137057
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	413435

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
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	1,360
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Edmond Moxon
Headteacher	Fergus Stewart
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01225 309500
Fax number	01225 309572
Email address	admin@st-laurence.wilts.sch.uk

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