



# Sir Graham Balfour High School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 124444  
**Local Authority** Staffordshire  
**Inspection number** 292998  
**Inspection date** 1 February 2007  
**Reporting inspector** David Anstead HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	North Avenue
<b>School category</b>	Community		Stafford
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		ST16 1NR
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01785 223490
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	834	<b>Fax number</b>	01785 250145
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	114		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	N Cobon
		<b>Headteacher</b>	David Wright
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 March 2002		

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

The school is of average size. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is average. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds represent a much lower proportion than the national average. The number of students in the sixth form is relatively small and provision is shared with neighbouring schools and a local college. This is the school's first year of having specialist mathematics and computing status. The school moved into new buildings a few years ago.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

The overall effectiveness of the school is good with some outstanding features. Students enjoy school. They are appreciative of the excellent facilities and resources they have and the good staff. Students recognise they have opportunities that others may not have and particularly so in some other parts of the world. Accordingly, shortly after moving into the new school buildings, students and parents set about raising the necessary funds to build a parallel Sir Graham Balfour School in Cambodia. The other school is now operational and has been visited by student ambassadors from the school here. Students are continuing to raise funds to support the provision of teachers and resources in the Cambodian school. This is a fine example of the ways in which the school enables students' outstanding personal development.

The care, guidance and support provided to students are excellent. Mixed age house groups are extremely effective in promoting good relationships and in encouraging older students to support younger students. One girl described her house group as being 'like a big family'. Through partnerships with neighbouring schools and a local college the school is able to offer students an outstanding range of subjects and courses to choose from. The school recognises the need to bring the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form up to the same good standard found in the main school. Achievement is good and standards are above average, although the proportion of top A\* and A grades achieved by the most able students, who are not always challenged in lessons as well as they could be, is lower than the national average.

Self-evaluation is extremely well used to identify strengths to be shared more widely and weaknesses needing further development. Issues prioritised for action are tackled swiftly and effectively. Consequently, many aspects of the school's work are strongly improving. The school has made a flying start in implementing its specialist status plan. It is too early for specialist status to have impacted on the quality of teaching and learning and examination results, but even after just one term there has been a positive impact on the curriculum and computer facilities. This is a confident and successful school with outstanding leadership and management and an excellent capacity to continue to improve.

Parents are appreciative of the good quality of education their children receive at the school. One parent wrote to inspectors, 'I strongly recommend the school and wish I could turn the clock back and attend myself!'

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Standards in the sixth form are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. The curriculum is jointly provided with neighbouring schools and a local college, enabling a very wide range of academic and vocational choices to be offered. Leadership and management are good. Students' progress is carefully checked and any underachievement quickly spotted. However, the school has recognised that achievement in the sixth form is not as good as in the main school. It intends to raise

achievement in the sixth form by improving the quality of teaching to match the best practice seen elsewhere in the school.

Facilities for independent learning have improved with the provision of excellent private study space. Students' personal development and well-being are excellent. They develop very good leadership qualities through membership of the sixth form committee and school parliament. They contribute considerably to school life and the wider community, as mentors to younger students and through involvement in primary schools. One sixth former said, 'Everyone is approachable. There is a very good team spirit in the school and good links with our parents who know how we are doing.' Consequently retention rates between Years 12 and 13 are exceptionally high. Students value the expert guidance about future studies and employment that is available to them. The sixth form is successfully raising students' aspirations and an increasing number, currently around 80%, progress into further education each year.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Increase the proportion of top grades attained in GCSE examinations.
- Raise achievement by spreading best practice in teaching and learning, especially in the sixth form.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Attainment on entry is broadly average. Students make good and sometimes outstanding progress during Key Stage 3 so that standards in the national tests at the end of Year 9 are above average. Students continue to make good progress during Key Stage 4 and standards in GCSE examinations are above average. The proportion of students achieving 5 GCSEs grades A\* to C, where these include English and mathematics, is the ninth most improved in the country. However, the proportion of more able students achieving the highest A\* and A grades at GCSE is about half the national average and the school has rightly prioritised improving this. There is no underachievement amongst any particular group of students.

The school follows national guidance in setting performance targets based on students' prior attainment. Targets are challenging because the school expects achievement to be in the top 25% of all schools nationally.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

An innovative system of mixed age tutor groups replicates the benefits of family life. Younger students have good role models they aspire to emulate. Older students say they feel responsible for caring for the younger students in their tutor group. Moral

issues raised in assemblies are discussed well during tutor time. Key Stage 3 students work with a local racial integration group. All Key Stage 4 students study a multicultural religious education GCSE. Students are mostly thoughtful, caring and tolerant. Consequently students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. The use of fixed term and permanent exclusions by the school is below average. Attendance has improved and is now above average.

Key Stage 3 students have two or more hours of timetabled physical activity a week. This falls to one and a half hours at Key Stage 4 although students can opt to study GCSE physical education (PE) or to participate in after-school sports clubs. Healthy food options are available in the school canteen and students making healthy choices are rewarded with house points. Vending machines selling fizzy drinks, crisps and chocolate have been removed. Students say they feel safe in school although they find the occasional presence of older ex-students at the school exits intimidating. Students have a say in the running of the school through the school parliament and through their representatives on a governors' committee. Students are very well prepared for their future economic well-being. Enterprise education is outstanding. Students are being taught about risk taking and increasingly being given opportunities to do so for real. For example, the youth award group were given a budget of £500 and a brief to plan the school's waste recycling strategy. Early indications are that the group are making an unexpected profit!

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The school sets clear expectations for teachers in planning good lessons. Teachers share learning objectives with students so that they know what they are aiming to understand or master. In the best lessons teachers plan interesting starter activities that engage the interest of students and then deftly link to the main thrust of the lesson. For example, in an English lesson the starter activity was about 'innuendo', which enabled students to deepen their knowledge and understanding of how word play aids comedy writing. This led well into the main work for the lesson which was to examine the use of word play in a Shakespearean comedy. However, the school is aware that teachers need to stretch the most able in each class more by providing them with their own challenging learning objectives. Plenaries, which are intended to summarise for students what they have learnt during the lesson, are not as well executed as the starter activities. Plenaries provide insufficient opportunity for students to reflect individually on their achievements during the lesson.

The quality of teaching and learning overall is good but only satisfactory in the sixth form. This is because successful approaches to teaching and learning used well in the

main school tend not to be utilised in A-level lessons, where teachers have a greater tendency to lecture rather than to teach.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The curriculum meets statutory requirements as well as providing an exceptional choice of subjects at Key Stage 4. Students can choose from a range of 21 vocational courses in subjects as diverse as brick and block, hairdressing, agriculture and photography. An excellent partnership with a local college enables around one third of the students to experience vocational courses provided there. This approach has proven successful in helping students transfer to full-time training when they leave school. The sixth form curriculum is jointly provided with neighbouring schools and the college, enabling a wide range of academic and vocational courses to be offered. Specialist status is beginning to have an impact on the curriculum. A gifted and talented mathematics group has been established in Year 9, new information and communication technology (ICT) qualifications have been introduced and a web site to support learning is under development. There is an extensive programme of after-school clubs and activities. These include sports and subject based activities as well as musical productions and are very well attended by students.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students are very well cared for by pastoral staff and through an unusually wide range of counsellors working in school to support students with bereavement, anger management and low self-esteem. A student support manager is available to students at all times who helps students access the support they need. The governors have approved an innovative relationship with the Samaritans, who provide support to students in school in extreme situations. This is currently the only such relationship in the country and is proving to be highly effective. In addition there are around 15 trained peer mentors who support students during the school day as well as being contactable by email out of school time.

Guidance on future career choices is good. All Year 9 students have an individual interview with a member of the leadership group and their parents to ensure their Key Stage 4 option choices are appropriate to their ability and needs. The school closely monitors each student's academic progress against their target grades. Effective action, including the provision of after-school subject surgeries and mentors, is taken where individual underachievement is identified. Teachers use the outcomes of assessment to write individual learning targets in students' books every few weeks. Guidance on how to improve is outstanding. Parents are well informed and involved by the school in setting their children's targets and in reviewing their progress towards achieving them.

Child protection procedures are well implemented. Procedures for safeguarding students meet government requirements.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The leadership of the headteacher and senior staff is outstanding. They lead from the front and are setting a cracking pace. Many aspects of the school's work are showing strong improvements. Behaviour and motivation in lessons are greatly improved. Attendance has improved. Rapid progress has been made in implementing the school's specialist status plan in just the one term since designation. Standards in national tests are rising and the school has become oversubscribed in an area where overall pupil numbers are falling.

There is an extremely rigorous and systematic approach to quality assurance. Senior staff and governors work closely with heads of faculty and house heads in evaluating each team's performance. A wide range of staff are involved in reviewing the school's performance and consequently the school has an extremely clear view of its strengths and weaknesses. Priorities for future action are identified, appropriately resourced and effectively tackled. Good practice is systematically shared. The use of self-evaluation to drive whole-school improvement is exemplary.

Governors are highly committed and closely involved in the work of the school. They are extremely well organised and meticulous in ensuring that protocols and policies are effective and of a high quality. The systems and processes the governors have put into place over the last few years have been instrumental in improving the school. The impact of governance on school improvement is outstanding.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	3

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1	1
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	1

<sup>1</sup> 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.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
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	

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Following our visit to inspect your school, I am writing to tell you about our findings. I would like to thank those of you we spoke to for the friendly welcome you gave us. Your thoughtful responses to our questions helped us decide what is good about your school and what needs to be improved. The education you receive at your school is good overall with some outstanding features.

These are the main strengths of your school:

- You enjoy coming to school because it has excellent facilities and because relationships are good.
- The way the school helps you in your personal development is outstanding.
- The guidance you receive on how to improve your performance is outstanding.
- The range of subjects you can choose from is outstanding.
- Your governors, headteacher and senior staff are outstanding and making the school better.

There are two aspects of the school's work which we think can be better. The proportion of top A\* and A grades attained by Year 11 in their GCSE examinations is below the national average, and students in the sixth form are making slower progress than they did previously further down the school. I have asked your headteacher to ensure that the highest attaining students are always challenged to do as well as they can, and to improve the progress you make in the sixth form by encouraging teachers to plan the kinds of lessons that work well in the main school.

I wish you every success in the future.