

The Sele School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117535
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312646
Inspection date	21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Robert Drew

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	419
6th form	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Malcolm Honour
Headteacher	Mr Nicholas Binder
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	Welwyn Road Hertford Hertfordshire SG14 2DG
Telephone number	01992 581455
Fax number	01992 500408

Age group	11-18
Inspection date	21 May 2008
Inspection number	312646

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and these specific issues: standards and achievement; personal development and the quality of care, guidance and support; the quality of teaching and learning; and the overall effectiveness of the Sixth Form. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons and students' work, parents' questionnaires, interviews with staff, students and the chair of governors and analysis of extensive school documentation, including its self-evaluation. Other aspects were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no reason to suggest that the school's own self-evaluation was not justified and this has been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school and its sixth form are both much smaller than average. They serve a broad range of students who, on balance, are economically disadvantaged and have below average attainment on entry. The great majority are White British, with about eight per cent from several minority ethnic communities. The school holds joint specialist status as a sports college and performing arts college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has some outstanding features and is eager to improve those that are satisfactory or good.

The school has worked successfully to raise standards and levels of achievement. Students enter with below average attainment but their standards now match national averages by the end of Year 11. GCSE results are rising year on year. Achievement is good, particularly in Key Stage 4. In English, pupils make exceptional progress throughout the main school. The school is adept at diagnosing and meeting the needs of those students who find learning difficult as well as the gifted and talented so that they too make good progress.

Personal development is excellent. Behaviour is good, as is spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students' awareness of how to live healthily and safely is good. Above all, students make an excellent contribution to others, both through the highly effective school council and individually, supporting charity work, helping the elderly and pupils at a local special school or striving to make the school more environmentally friendly. Students also contribute significantly to the Hertford Town Youth Council. They listen to and respect each other. For some students who arrived with low self-esteem or following exclusions from other schools, the growth in confidence and social skills is remarkable.

These successes reflect excellent care, guidance and support. The school exploits its relatively small size well so that staff get to know each student quickly and thoroughly. Support is of high quality, particularly when focussed through the very effective Learning Support Centre (LSC). Students arriving part way through a term adjust very well to the school's expectations and approach as a result of being based in the LSC. Underperformance is swiftly identified by rigorous academic monitoring and quickly countered by additional support for individuals or small groups. All statutory safeguarding requirements are fully met. The monitoring of attendance has become particularly rigorous since the last inspection. As a result, attendance levels have risen from below average to significantly above average over the last three years. Crucially, staff are consistent in their application of school policies, including the giving of praise whenever it is merited. Students rightly say they feel confident and valued.

Teaching and learning are good and contribute significantly to students' successful personal development and more directly to standards and achievement. Teaching is typically clear and builds on very good relationships. Lessons are well planned. Not only has the school ensured that good teaching predominates, but it has also established some examples of outstanding practice. In such lessons, the expectation of how much work students can do, and to what standard is impressive.

The curriculum is good. It has more than sufficient variety and depth to be attractive to students and allows staff to teach imaginatively. Extra-curricular provision is very good, with many clubs and societies and an ambitious programme of visits. Both the formal curriculum and additional provision illustrate the excellent role played by the school's specialist status. All Key Stage 4 students, for instance, take GCSE sport, while dance, drama and music have much more prominence than usual. Rising standards owe much to the contribution of these subjects. Equally, lessons and extra-curricular activities in these areas contribute particularly well to the high levels of confidence and sociability students acquire. They also offer scope to serve others, for instance, through the sports leadership award schemes. The take up for these schemes is

impressive, especially for a small school, with nearly 70 students awarded the Junior Sports Leadership Award (JSLA) in 2007.

Links with the wider community are excellent. The school offers a range of extended services, and has become the hub for much community activity both during the school day and after hours. The school manages an on-site children's centre and has links with an extensive range of community groups, including sports clubs, who use its facilities and offer coaching and other benefits in return. Several students studying dance, for instance, act as tutors for a local dance school held on the premises. Others have recently been working with community police officers to provide alternative or 'diversionary' evening activities for young people in the immediate locality. Police report a noticeable drop in crime in the area since the programme began. Parental support expressed in questionnaire returns is very high and well founded. One spoke for many in saying, 'My daughter is more settled and happy than I could have hoped for. Whatever they are doing at the school, it seems to be working!'

Leadership and management are good overall and have recently enabled students to make good academic progress. Governors and subject leaders generally contribute well and both are increasingly clear about how to develop their roles. The headteacher provides excellent vision and sense of purpose and he is extremely well supported by senior colleagues. Together they support staff and monitor their work very effectively. Self-evaluation is good and the school has demonstrated success in improving attendance, the curriculum, behaviour and the school's reputation in the town. The capacity for further improvement is excellent.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Overall, the sixth form currently offers satisfactory effectiveness and value for money, but is improving. It is well led and managed, which has prompted a range of important recent changes. Consortium arrangements, for example, are now highly efficient so that students based at this school have reliable access to a very wide curriculum. Monitoring of academic progress has improved, with students and their parents much more involved than previously. This, allied to effective pastoral support, ensures excellent care, guidance and support. Consequently, students' personal development is also excellent. Students show impressive confidence, maturity and a strong sense of enjoyment and security. In particular, they are eager to take on responsibility and they make an outstanding contribution to school life and that of the wider community. Over 60 per cent have specific posts of responsibility and 40 per cent follow a sports leadership course. Sixth form dance students regularly teach younger pupils at a nearby special school.

Academic standards are broadly average and achievement satisfactory. Both are improving as the quality of teaching and learning rise and curriculum and specialist facilities improve. With rising GCSE results, students express growing confidence in their ability to tackle post-16 courses. They also see the school's sixth form provision as increasingly attractive and more are staying on after Year 11. Many academically able students previously left to follow courses with other providers, but the intake in current Year 12 and 13 more accurately reflects the full range of abilities of students attending the main school. These factors have not yet had time to influence post-16 examination results.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to enhance the school's sixth form provision and thereby raise students' standards and achievement.

- In the main school, lift teaching standards even higher by emulating the outstanding practice that already exists.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	----------------	-------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
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	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	2	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

22 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Sele School, Hertford, SG14 2DG

Thank you for your welcome during my visit last week. I particularly enjoyed talking to the large group of students that gave up much of lunchtime to meet with me.

You are right to be pleased with your school. Compared with standards across the country it does many things well. Yours is an effective school and has some excellent features. The school is keen to improve in all of those areas that are not yet excellent.

The main strengths of the school are:

- the good progress you make, including exceptional progress in English;
- the good teaching you receive;
- the outstanding way it helps you become confident and mature - you behave well and make an excellent contribution to the school and the community;
- the high quality of teaching and learning, with some lessons that are excellent;
- the good overall leadership and management of the school, including the excellent work of your headteacher;
- the way its work as a specialist college for sport and the performing arts has had such a beneficial impact on the whole life of the school.

If things are to improve even further the school needs to:

- make sure recent improvement in standards and progress in the sixth form continue and are demonstrated in examination results;
- make better use of the outstanding lessons some teachers give to improve other lessons.

Best wishes for the rest of your time at Sele.

Yours sincerely

Robert Drew

Lead inspector