

The Leventhorpe School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137156
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	385576
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2012
Lead inspector	Roderick Passant

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-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	1156
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	308
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Roger Beeching
Headteacher	Jonathan Locke
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2006
School address	Cambridge Road Sawbridgeworth CM21 9BY
Telephone number	01279 836633
Fax number	01279 600339
Email address	education@leventhorpe.net

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Jennifer Bax	Additional inspector
Cheryl Jackson	Additional inspector
Roderick Passant	Additional inspector
Isobel Randall	Additional inspector
Michael Stanton	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The responses to the on-line questionnaire, (Parent View) were taken into account in planning the inspection. The inspection team saw 55 lessons or part lessons. Meetings were held with members of staff and seven members of the governing body including the Chair of the Governing Body. In addition, they had many informal conversations with students and met formally with a group of sixth form students and students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors took account of the 676 parent or carer responses to the questionnaire and the sample of 150 student and 85 staff responses received. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation associated with safeguarding, school assessment data and school improvement planning.

Information about the school

The school is above average in size compared to other secondary schools. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low. Although the school is enriched by students from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is low, including the proportion of students with a statement of educational needs.

The school has held specialist Business and Enterprise status since 2004. It converted to an academy in August 2011. It is also a Training School. The school works in close partnership with another school and other providers to extend the curriculum that is offered, particularly in the sixth form. The school hosts a programme of adult learning courses and a new joint-use school and community leisure centre has recently been opened.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- Leventhorpe is an outstanding school with an outstanding sixth form.
- Outstanding leadership and management at all levels have established a highly cohesive and inclusive learning community, which provides a rich range of curriculum experiences and a sustained focus on supporting students in the main school and sixth form to do as well as they can.
- Students are rapidly absorbed into the school’s calm, purposeful ethos. They make rapid progress and attain academic standards which are significantly above average. Academic standards show an improving trend and recent acceleration. Achievement is outstanding.
- Learning and teaching across the main school and sixth form and in most subjects is consistently of high quality with much teaching which is outstanding. Teachers are skilled at motivating and engaging students. They have positive relationships with the students. There is strong mutual respect. They create a supportive atmosphere in which students are confident to share their ideas.
- Students’ conduct around the school is exemplary and their excellent behaviour in lessons makes a significant contribution to their learning and progress. Students feel very safe in school. Bullying is rare.
- The school council is very active and contributes to formulation of school policy. Nevertheless, a minority of students felt that the school was not interested in their views about the school. Sixth formers have their own perspective about the organisation of the sixth form but no clear forum to express their views.
- There is strong provision for students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school fosters students’ self-esteem and independence as learners particularly well. The result is that students in the main school and sixth form develop as well-rounded young people, confident and aspirational. They want to achieve and do well. A very large majority of Year 13 students go on to higher education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Develop further the students' 'voice' in the school and particularly the sixth form, in order to consider their perspective in making improvements and refinements to the school's organisation.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment on entry to the school is above average but there is a full range of ability. Students make rapid progress and attainment is significantly above average. Students make particularly rapid progress in English and mathematics, exceeding national expectations. The school's specialism makes a significant contribution to achievement because all students take one of a range of external qualifications, which includes GCSE at the end of Year 9. A third of students take AS level in Year 11.

Although boys attain above the national average and there was no discernible difference in boys' and girls' attainment and progress in classrooms. Higher-attaining pupils are challenged effectively in lessons. Students identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good overall progress, particularly in English and mathematics where their attainment is above average. Teachers are aware of their needs and adopt strategies in the classroom to meet them. Learning support assistants are skilled at fostering confidence, prompting students' thinking and understanding without undermining their independence. Numbers in any specific minority ethnic group are small and in classes they make similar progress to their peers.

Students work well together, listen and share ideas and are confident to express or defend their point of view. They concentrate well and show high levels of engagement, for example working through their tangent problem in mathematics or providing explanations about the earth's structures in geography. Students used close observational skills in a mathematics lesson and demonstrated a willingness to hypothesise and keenness to think imaginatively and creatively about shape and proportion. Students develop particularly well as independent, motivated and disciplined learners.

Students make consistently good or better progress in the sixth form where attainment is significantly above average. Results in 2011 show further improvement. Almost all students see their courses through to completion. Students' independent learning skills are developed further. In a history lesson, students made clear connections to prior learning, research and reading of critical evaluations. They made particularly strong use of key subject terminology as they answered questions. As in the main school, students are confident users of information and communication technology.

Most parents and carers accurately judge that their child is making good progress,

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their child's needs are met, and the school helps develop their child's communication, reading, writing, and mathematical skills. The virtual learning environment provides a comprehensive tool to support students' learning. It also provides parents and carers access to support their child's studies.

Quality of teaching

Teachers' management of learning has made a step change of improvement because it is a concerted whole-school ongoing focus. The impact of this work is most evident in the improvement in sixth form results in 2011 and the further acceleration of students' progress leading to significantly improved mock GCSE results.

Across the school, the sixth form and in most subjects teaching is of consistently high quality. There is much outstanding teaching. No inadequate teaching was seen. Lessons where there was outstanding teaching made significant demands on the students and the teacher was precise in what the students would achieve by the end of the lessons so that activities built towards that objective. Good lessons tended to lack that precision of objective or make such demands on the student. Nonetheless, some good lessons seen, at an early stage of a unit of work, were very effectively laying the groundwork for future rapid progress or were focused on highly effective consolidation of students' skills. Most parents and carers rightly judge that their child is well taught at this school. Most students judge that teaching is at least good for most of the time.

Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic in their approach. Teachers know students as individuals, plan for their needs and meet these through the strategies they employ. They are confident and skilled to model the work, for example, the English teacher sharing her own writing to elicit a critical response from her students. They use a wide range of activities and challenging tasks to actively engage students. They arouse students' curiosity and preparedness to engage in moral, ethical and cultural issues and provide strong opportunities to assume leadership roles or work cooperatively. Teaching makes an extremely positive contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Teachers are skilled in questioning both to extend students' thinking and to check on learning. They have high expectations of what students can achieve and they foster their independence as learners and self-esteem extremely well. The school has a clear focus on developing students' thinking and learning skills. Units of work within the subject curriculum are planned carefully to ensure progression. Communication, literacy and mathematical skills are reinforced well in lessons. Marking in most subjects is of a high quality. In some subjects, such as English, the use of assessment as a way of promoting learning and working in partnership with students is fully established in the department's teaching strategies and approaches.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students typically conduct themselves in an exemplary, courteous fashion around the school. Their respect for each other and general maturity creates a powerful, calm

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and purposeful learning ethos and highly cohesive and inclusive community. Students' behaviour in lessons is a clear strength of the school. They have excellent attitudes to learning, are motivated and aspire to do well. These are very significant factors in their rapid progress.

Almost all parents and carers judge that the school keeps their child safe and almost all students judged they felt safe in school. Most parents and carers judged their child was looked after well at the school. There is strong attention paid to health and safety in lessons and students are taught how to use the internet safely.

Students feel safe because bullying is a rare event. Most parents and carers judged the school managed instances of bullying well or left the answer blank. Nevertheless, there are a few parents who disagreed. In a very recent full student perception survey, the management of bullying emerged as a school strength along with the school's discipline.

Most parents and carers judge there to be a good standard of behaviour in the school. While a small minority of parents and carers disagreed with the statement 'my child's lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour' student referrals to senior staff are very low. Fixed term exclusions are very low and permanent exclusions very rare.

Attendance is above average and improved. Students arrive to lessons and school punctually.

Leadership and management

The school's leadership is ambitious for the school and all its students. Self-evaluation is robust and there is forensic analysis of the school's assessment and other data. The result is that the school knows itself extremely well and tackles aspects of underperformance quickly and effectively. Ongoing improvement, refinement and development are embedded in the school's leadership culture. Given the rising trend in achievement because of the further development of teaching and learning, leadership and management are exceptionally well placed to sustain and enhance improvement.

The school's vision and ambition is shared by staff. Almost all staff judge they know what the school is trying to do. All staff judge that leaders do all they can to improve teaching. There is accurate and robust monitoring of teaching. Teaching has improved because: it has been a whole school focus; staff development; training; coaching and the sharing skills across subjects. There is strong professional support. Staff are reflective and want to improve their skills. There is also strong accountability at all levels for the performance of students and the progress they are making against challenging but achievable targets. The school actively promotes equality, seeking to narrow any gaps in performance that might exist. It also takes a strong stance on identifying and tackling any form of discrimination.

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The governing body has a high profile in the school, makes a strong contribution to the ethos of professional accountability and provides clear strategic leadership. It is very aware of its responsibilities regarding the safeguarding and the health and safety of the staff and students. Safeguarding meets statutory requirements and gives no cause for concern.

The formal and enrichment curriculum provides a broad range of rich learning opportunities for students to gain success. It also provides many opportunities for students to reflect on their own lives, the lives of others and to express their views on moral and ethical issues. Students also have many opportunities to work together, develop their understanding of other cultures and awareness of the global dimension.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	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 2010 to 31 August 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.
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.



16 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Leventhorpe School, Sawbridgeworth, CM21 9BY

Thank you for making us so welcome in your school when we came to inspect it. I am grateful to all the students who gave up their time to talk to us and submitted questionnaires. What you had to say was interesting and helpful.

You attend an outstanding school with an outstanding sixth form. It provides a rich range of curriculum experiences and a sustained focus on ensuring that in the main school and sixth form you do as well as you can. You make rapid progress and attainment is significantly above average. There is high quality teaching across the main school, the sixth form, and in most subjects. Overall your achievement is outstanding because the teaching you receive is outstanding.

Your behaviour is outstanding. This does not mean that it is perfect. Your behaviour around the school is, however, typically exemplary and in lessons you show high levels of engagement and very positive attitudes to learning. You told us that you feel extremely safe in school and one of the contributory factors for this is the fact that bullying is rare.

The school's leadership and management are outstanding. School leaders have a very clear idea what needs to improve and put things in place to secure improvements quickly. We asked the headteacher to strengthen the opportunities you have to put forward your ideas about the way the school and the sixth form are run. We appreciate that you have an active school council. We were impressed with your maturity, confidence and your aspirations to do well. Your perspective on school improvements and school organisation we are sure would be interesting and helpful to the school's senior leadership team. One of the strengths of the school is the fact that continually seeking improvement is part of the school's culture. You have all played a part in developing the school to what it is now. Many of you can play a real part in developing its future.

Yours sincerely

Roderick Passant
Lead inspector

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