

# Sands School

43 East Street, Ashburton, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ13 7AX

<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–3 October 2013	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This school is good because

- Pupils make good progress, including in mathematics and especially in English, where some make excellent progress.
- Many pupils have previously experienced a disrupted education and their achievements are a result of good teaching and the use of an effective curriculum.
- Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. They make excellent use of the school's rigorously applied democratic principles, which have an exceptional impact on their personal development as individuals and as self-confident learners.
- Pupils' welfare, health and safety are outstanding because the school is an exceptionally safe and supportive learning environment where the extremely high levels of mutual respect between pupils of different ages and between pupils and staff promote their development and their achievements.
- The school's leadership and management arrangements, in which all pupils and staff are actively involved, have a good impact on quality of teaching and pupils' achievements. They provide the basis of a flourishing school community, which has improved its outcomes since the last inspection.

### It is not yet outstanding because

- Some teaching is not yet as good as the best.
- The analysis of pupils' achievement is not used as well as it could be to help pupils improve their progress.
- Marking of books does not always provide pupils with guidance about how to improve their performance.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with a day's notice.
- The inspector observed 12 lessons taught by eight different teachers and attended the School Meeting. He looked at pupils' work, and held meetings with pupils, parents and carers, members of the school staff and the Chair of the Governing Body.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of pupils' progress, monitoring reports of teaching and learning, and staff training records.
- There were 28 parents or carers who responded to the on-line Ofsted questionnaires and 18 questionnaire responses from staff were evaluated.

## Inspection team

John Gush, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Sands School is a mixed independent secondary day school situated in the town of Ashburton, in Devon, in a large 19th century town house.
- It is registered for up to 81 pupils aged from 11 to 17 years of age. Currently, there are 64 full-time pupils on roll, most of whom are White British and have English as their first language.
- A substantial proportion of pupils have experienced a disrupted education before coming to the school and many pupils start at the school late in their school career.
- Three pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Although most places are privately funded, there are a small number funded by a charitable trust or by local authorities.
- The school is a charitable trust and opened in 1987. It was last inspected in March 2010.
- The school uses alternative provision and makes use of a local sports centre and swimming pool.
- Its aims are based on the philosophy of democratic schooling: 'which puts pupils' social and emotional development at the heart of learning, to equip each young person to be an effective and contributing member of a free democratic society'. In line with this, the day-to-day running of the school and key decision-making processes are made by the weekly School Meeting which consists of all staff and pupils currently in the school.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers have the best possible opportunities to help all pupils achieve at their personal best by:
  - ensuring that all teaching is regularly evaluated so that all teachers' lessons are as effective as the best
  - making sure that teachers' marking always provides pupils with the guidance they need to improve
  - carrying out a more detailed analysis of pupils' achievements to ensure that teachers have all the information they need to provide the best possible challenge for all pupils.
- Improve leadership and management so that checking systems ensure that every aspect of the school's performance is fully evaluated.

## Inspection judgements

### Pupils' achievement

**Good**

Pupils' achievements are good, as a result of good teaching, an effective curriculum and the excellent learning environment. This outcome is also a consequence of the rigorous implementation of the school's democratic structures, which enables pupils to make good progress in all subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils achieve good results at GCSE relative to their starting points, including those with a statement of special educational needs. Almost all pupils re-engage with education quickly and successfully and most make up lost ground extremely well. Many pupils make very good progress in English and art.

The pupils are eager learners. They are keen to contribute in lessons and they say that they very much enjoy their learning. They take pride in their work, much of which is effectively displayed in classrooms and around the school. This is especially the case with their artwork, which is of an exceptional quality. All pupils learn to use information and communication technology (ICT), and this is effectively used throughout the school to extend learning, especially in literacy and numeracy.

Pupils make very good use of the school's democratic institutions. Their ability to choose what to study and whether to attend lessons motivates them well to work hard in their lessons. When they take part in the decision-making process, they develop exceptional qualities of thoughtfulness and the ability to offer balanced arguments, for example at the weekly School Meeting, where the pupils and staff together take all decisions about the management of the school. During the inspection, the meeting considered the relative merits of applicants for a teaching assistant post. Pupils made clear and insightful presentations of the outcomes of their shortlisting and interview processes. The pupil who chaired the meeting ensured that all, including the youngest pupils as well as experienced staff, were able to speak and express their views. She also accepted and benefited from helpful guidance from both pupils and adults. Pupils contributed very well with self-assured dignity and clarity of thought. The meeting concluded with a series of votes, which were ably managed by the chair.

The school's leavers have an excellent record of continuing education and progression. All those pupils who left the school in the previous year have made appropriate transitions, some to continue their education and others into work.

### Pupils' behaviour and personal development

**Outstanding**

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Lessons take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Pupils support one another and say that this is because they understand the impact that their behaviour can have on others. Attendance at school is good, especially in view of the number who had been disaffected with education before coming to the school. Although attendance at lessons is not compulsory, most opt to take part in the programme they have chosen. Pupils receive helpful support from the very effective tutorial system as well as from their peers. Pupils greet visitors with interest and impeccable manners. Parents and carers are very positive about the impact that the school has on their children's behaviour and development. An elected group of pupils forms the school council, where sensitive behaviour issues are discussed and addressed and pupils appreciate and benefit from the boundaries they establish and maintain. This effectively promotes both pupils' behaviour and their self-confidence.

The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding because of the impact of the democratic operation of the school as well as the range of opportunities made available. For instance, all pupils and staff share mutual responsibility for the school's working environment by taking part in daily 'useful work' at the end of each school day,

ensuring that the school is ready for the activities of the following day. A group of pupils monitor the effectiveness of individuals' effort in this work, providing encouragement and incentives where needed. Through international forums of democratic education that the school belongs to and hosts, as well as the work undertaken in the personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, they gain a strong awareness of other cultures and lifestyles. They have recently met and worked with pupils from Austria, Japan and Puerto Rico. These activities promote pupils' awareness of other cultures and help them to develop an attitude of tolerance. They take part in the local community as volunteers in a charity shop, as lifeguards in the swimming pool, through the shared use of the school's organic garden and by discussing their democratic principles with other schools in the locality. These processes, together with the content of PHSE lessons, provide the pupils with a vibrant understanding of, and appreciation for, British democratic values. These are effectively reflected in the school's policies to ensure that whenever political views are expressed or discussed, a balanced view is promoted.

### Quality of teaching

**Good**

The quality of teaching is good and it has enabled pupils to make good progress over time in their academic subjects. It is not outstanding because some teaching is not as effective as the best. The best teaching uses high expectations and very effective methods to inspire pupils to achieve their highest potential. In an art lesson, for example, pupils were enthused by the teacher to look at a milk carton and 'see it like a face'. They chose from a wide variety of materials they had found to develop their creativity and to produce excellent and innovative work. A history lesson for older pupils enabled the class to gain new knowledge about health provision in the Roman Empire and to evaluate its significance, while at the same time developing writing and examination skills and learning from one another. Most teaching uses effective methods to help pupils make the most of their abilities, especially in literacy and numeracy. Some teaching, however, is less effective, with teachers relying too much on the pupils' willingness to learn and on their excellent behaviour. In these lessons, teachers provide too much information and pupils are not challenged well enough to develop their own learning skills.

Pupils' abilities are assessed when they start at the school and regularly thereafter. These assessments are used very well to identify when additional help is required. This is provided when needed by teaching assistants or by additional special lessons so that any specific learning needs are addressed. The school works closely with parents and carers, some of whom provide additional support from their own resources. All teachers know their pupils' abilities well and most ensure that each pupil receives the individual attention he or she needs to progress well.

Almost all teachers make good use of their subject knowledge to enthuse and inspire pupils. Across the school, teachers regularly make use of ICT to stimulate learning. Most teachers mark pupils' work regularly, with the most effective marking supporting those pupils who are preparing for examinations. Here, marking is well used to identify strategies for improvement. However, some marking is less good and teachers do not always make clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work. Excellent tutorial arrangements mean that each pupil's progress in all subjects is formally discussed three times each term by pupils and their tutors. This ensures that all pupils and teachers know what is needed to improve the pupils' progress.

### Quality of curriculum

**Good**

The school has developed a good curriculum that is broad and balanced and makes good use of carefully planned schemes of work for all subjects, including PSHE. Tutorial meetings take place three times a term for each pupil and these are used to ensure that every pupil's learning programme includes all the required areas of learning. The curriculum is used well to enable pupils to make good progress over time. A recent curriculum review identified the desire amongst pupils for additional opportunities to extend their range of knowledge and abilities. As a result, twice-weekly 'master classes' have been introduced. These provide the chance for pupils to extend their

learning and skills in a diverse range of areas ranging from car mechanics and pure mathematics to 'green roof' building construction and advanced chemistry. These new classes are popular with pupils and provide good learning opportunities.

Where pupils have a statement of special educational needs, careful attention is paid to ensure that the stated requirements are met. The curriculum, and the way that it is implemented, ensures that statement requirements are fulfilled.

Physical education takes place using the school's all-weather pitch and indoor climbing wall as well as at the local leisure centre and swimming pool. It is much enjoyed by pupils and has a good impact on improving individuals' health and fitness. An extensive range of outings, such as to museums and local places of interest, extends the pupils' knowledge and interest in their locality and in the world at large. These are supplemented by visits from craftspeople such as a blacksmith and a wood carver, as well as talks on political and world affairs. For instance, a local photographer who was injured in Syria recounted his experience and led a discussion on the implications of the conflict, which pupils found insightful.

Pupils receive helpful advice about future options through PHSE lessons, the termly tutorial arrangements and visits from expert advisers. This helps pupils to make good decisions about their next steps when they leave the school.

### **Pupils' welfare, health and safety**

### **Outstanding**

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding and all the requirements for independent schools are met. The pupils, and their parents and carers, experience the school as a safe and very supportive learning environment where pupils are able to express their individuality and enjoy the company of other pupils and members of staff alike. A highlight is the mutual respect that pupils of different ages demonstrate for one another. The very effective behaviour policy is rooted in the school's democratic structures and all issues of concern or discipline are dealt with through the School Meeting, with the whole school community taking part. One result of this is that pupils say they experience very little bullying and that any possible bullying situations are resolved rapidly and effectively. Valuable work on cyber bullying and the potential dangers of using social networking sites takes place in tutorial sessions and in PHSE lessons.

The school has a very good range of policies to promote the well-being of the pupils and they are implemented rigorously. While pupils are actively involved in most aspects of staff recruitment, the school's bursar is responsible for the appropriate and robust arrangements that are made to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children, including those not directly employed by the school. All required checks are made and are effectively recorded on a single central register. The child protection officer and his deputies are diligent in their duties. They have received the required advanced level training and ensure that all staff receive regular child protection training in addition to training in fire safety, first aid, health and safety, and risk assessment. Regular fire drills and health and safety checks are rigorously implemented. Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained.

### **Leadership and management**

### **Good**

Leadership and management are good and the school makes good use of its democratic structures to carry out the leadership tasks and the management of the school. As a result, pupils achieve well. Where the entire school community takes part in decision-making, the outcomes are excellent. Pupils' involvement is very well structured and supported and enhances the operation of the school, while providing them with excellent learning and development opportunities. In addition, the school has developed extensive procedures for collecting and considering the views of all involved with the school as the basis for developing the school's provision. For example, recent surveys of pupils', staff members' and parents' and carers' views have been analysed and shared,

and the process of staff appraisal includes pupils' views of teachers' performance. However, leadership and management are not outstanding because there is room for improvement in the procedures the school uses to evaluate its performance overall. In particular, some teachers would benefit from a more critical appraisal of their teaching. In addition, a more detailed analysis of pupil achievement would provide additional information for teachers so that they can provide the best possible challenge for all pupils. This would enhance teachers' ability to support all pupils' learning and help them to raise their achievement from good to outstanding. Governors fulfil a valuable role in ensuring that the school's democratic ethos is maintained and that all legal and regulatory requirements are fulfilled. The school complies with all the regulations for independent schools.

The school's premises include well-equipped classrooms and specialist facilities for ICT and art, as well as a science laboratory and a music performance and recording suite. The extensive grounds provide excellent opportunities for exercise and relaxation. All the required information for parents, carers and others is provided or made available on the school's very informative website or through its brochure and parent information pack. Thorough annual reports of pupils' progress are made available for parents and carers and reviews for those pupils with a statement of special educational needs are carried out as required. The school's complaints procedure meets requirements and is effectively implemented.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	113619
<b>Inspection number</b>	424911
<b>DfE registration number</b>	878/6042

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary day school
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–17 years
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	64
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Sands School Ltd.
<b>Chair</b>	Tim Current
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sean Bellamy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	March 2010
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£9,210
<b>Telephone number</b>	01364 653666
<b>Email address</b>	enquiry@sands-school.co.uk

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