



Sir William Ramsay School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 110506
LEA Buckinghamshire LEA
Inspection number 278447
Inspection dates 12 October 2005 to 13 October 2005
Reporting inspector Barry Jones AI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)	School address	Rose Avenue
School category	Community		Hazlemere
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP15 7UB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01494815211
Number on roll	932	Fax number	01494816734
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Richard Morris
Date of previous inspection	8 November 1999	Headteacher	Mrs Gaynor Comber

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by 4 additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Sir William Ramsay School is a non-selective modern school in an area served by grammar schools. Consequently the school receives a lower proportion of higher attaining pupils than most schools. It has a high number of statemented pupils as it houses both physically disabled and hearing impaired units. It has a higher proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds than is normally found.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sir William Ramsay School has improved rapidly in the last year and so, while the school evaluates itself as satisfactory, the inspectors view is that it is now a good school. The school has achieved well over the years but there was a dip in performance in 2003/4 when there was an acting headteacher and extensive use of temporary supply teachers. Good leadership by the new headteacher, ably supported by a strong management team and governing body, has put the school firmly back on track. There have been significant improvements in standards in the 2005 external examinations and achievement is good at GCSE and at GCE Advanced level. There is variation between subjects and, for instance, achievement is very good in the Arts subjects and satisfactory in mathematics and science. Taken over the last two years, teaching is satisfactory overall with good features while it has been consistently good in the sixth form. Pupils enjoy school, feel safe and receive good levels of care. Consequently, their personal development is good. This is a specialist arts college for the visual arts and the school's interpretation of the role is exemplary. Pupils are very much involved in related work in the community. Provision for pupils with special educational needs and those with language difficulties are very good and is reflected in their good progress. The school's budget was in deficit two years ago but is now in a strong financial position. Parents, carers and pupils speak highly of the school and it is currently oversubscribed. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. The school gives good value for money and has good capacity for improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is effective and efficient and this is the view of both the school and the inspectors. Standards overall are below average but results at advanced level in art and art textiles have been particularly good and above the national average. Progress is good generally with students of visual arts achieving very well given their prior attainment in GCSE examinations. Teaching is good and students praise the exceptional helpfulness of staff outside lessons. The curriculum meets the preferences of students well in responding to those wanting specialist arts provision but a limited range of vocational courses are offered. Students receive good support and guidance, notably benefiting from a substantial regular period of tutor contact. Leadership of the sixth form is good and effective in bringing about improvement in standards. Monitoring of student performance in the sixth form is satisfactory but evaluations to assess the progress of students are not sufficiently detailed. The sixth form has a growing reputation within the community and provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

* Continue to broaden the curriculum by devising vocational courses to meet the needs of all learners* Implement plans to share good practice in teaching so that pupils make good progress in mathematics and science.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good in the main school and in the sixth form although standards are lower than found nationally. The pupils do much better than might be expected given that the school receives few pupils with high prior attainment. In some respects, the school average reaches, and sometimes exceeds, the national average. This is the case for pupils attaining the nationally expected level in English, mathematics and science at KS3 and achieving at least one GCSE pass. There is variation between subjects. Progress is good, and sometimes outstanding, in visual arts subjects where there is some inspirational teaching. In mathematics and science, progress is satisfactory but there are fewer lessons that offer challenge to the more able pupils. Pupils with learning and language difficulties make very good progress and there are no groups of pupils that consistently underachieve. Girls outperform boys as they do nationally but the school monitors this carefully and each department has agreed strategies to raise boy's achievement. The school is setting and meeting challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils enjoy being at the school and they show good attitudes to learning. Attendance is now satisfactory following the appointment of an attendance officer to follow up absence and the introduction of electronic registration. More pupils are now staying on in the sixth form to benefit from the specialist arts college facilities. Behaviour around the school is satisfactory and staff deal effectively with the relatively small number of incidences of bullying. Pupils feel safe within the school and they are well informed of health issues and other dangers. Pupils' views are obtained through questionnaires as well as through the school council which is becoming established and effective. The personal development of pupils has been considerably enhanced by the initiatives taken by the school and the ethos created in the school is good. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good and this ensures that pupils raise their self-esteem. The school community embraces a wide range of pupil backgrounds but there are no tensions between groups and relationships are good. Pupils have significantly improved their skills in information technology and are well prepared for later life generally.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school assesses that the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form and the inspection confirms this evaluation. There are strengths in the teaching which ensure that pupils make good progress. Teachers routinely take account

of the differing needs of the pupils and they make sure that the learning objectives are clear and understood. For the most part work is challenging and teachers employ a range of methods to engage pupils and to ensure that they are on task at all times. The school's specialist status is well reflected in the very inspiring teaching which results in excellent progress in the visual and performing arts subjects. In this area, the school has become a focus for expertise and good practice. Sixth form teaching is consistently good. In some subjects, notably mathematics and science, teaching is satisfactory and the school has correctly identified the need for a more creative approach to the planning in order to encourage pupils to learn independently and to be critical of their own work. In 2003/04, about one-third of the teachers were on temporary supply and this slowed pupils' progress in some subjects in the main school and this was reflected in the 2004 examination results. Procedures for the assessment of learning are well established and consequently pupils are set targets which are realistic and challenging. Work is regularly marked so that pupils are aware of their levels and are clear about what they need to do to improve. Teachers are very sensitive to the requirements of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities as well as for those with language difficulties. There are inconsistencies in setting extension work for the most able but this has been identified by the school and strategies are being put in place.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school has a broad and balanced curriculum which satisfies statutory requirements. They are able to choose from a wide range of academic courses. As a result of a variety of initiatives, the number of vocational and work-related courses has improved significantly since the previous inspection. However, there are limited choices in both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and so the school does not fully meet the needs of all its pupils. To some extent this reflects parental preferences for academic courses and some proposed courses did not attract sufficient pupils to be viable. Pupils have good access to careers guidance and react positively to their work experience in Year 10. The school's specialist status has ensured that it is able to offer an exceptional range of opportunities in the visual and performing arts from when pupils enter in Year 7 through to GCSE and A level. The curriculum in the arts makes a particularly strong contribution to the celebration of different cultures. Pupils participate in a wide range of additional sports and activities during the lunch breaks and after school. The school promotes healthy living through careful planning of the curriculum. Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation of its curricular provision as satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care for its pupils. All child protection requirements are met and general safety around the school is good. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are good. The previous inspection report identified significant health and safety concerns and, whilst previous leadership of the school was slow to rectify these,

significant progress has been made in the last year and arrangements are now satisfactory. The school employs a full time matron which allows on-site medical treatment to take place reducing disruption to pupils' learning. Staff provide good guidance and support for all pupils throughout the school with all pupils included in activities. The needs of all pupils, including those with language difficulties, are identified when they arrive at school and appropriate support provided. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from very good support including specialist facilities for those with hearing impairment or physical disability and this enables them to make very good progress. Progress of all pupils is reviewed each term and the necessary support provided. As far as possible, pupils stay with the same Head of Year throughout and this helps them get well-informed guidance. Pupils are set appropriate targets and teaching is directed towards helping them achieve them. Careers guidance and work experience is provided for all pupils. The inspection confirms the school's own evaluation of good care.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management of the school are good and reflect a good capacity for improvement. The headteacher has been in post for just over a year and in that short time has established a clear vision of a school that focuses on creativity in learning as well as academic achievement. She acted swiftly and effectively to reduce the reliance on temporary staff and this helped to improve the results in 2005 because the pupils experienced greater consistency of teaching in lessons. There is a strong commitment to the inclusion of all pupils, irrespective of ability or background. Senior leaders have substantial delegated responsibilities that are discharged well so that the school runs efficiently; staff and pupils express confidence in the leadership. Self-evaluation is good and has involved all members of the community. The views of parents, carers and pupils are sought and acted upon. For instance, these consultations have resulted to changes in the school's homework and reporting procedures. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly through a relatively new system that actively involves heads of department and senior managers. Staff development needs are identified effectively and support readily provided where necessary. Departmental managers, whilst showing variability in quality, are committed to raising achievement. Performance data are used well to monitor progress of pupils in Years 7-11 and evaluate performance of subjects. Development planning in departments is integral to the whole school improvement plan. Initiatives such as the Specialist College Status in visual arts have created an environment of high achievement in this area of the curriculum. The 'Aim Higher' initiative in Years 10-13 is effective in ensuring that pupils are supported in progression to higher education. Governors are committed to supporting the school. They provide a valuable, diverse range of expertise. They challenge the school on its performance whilst adding valuable support. Links with the community in general are actively pursued and the school's reputation in the area has increased in recent times. Resources are used well. Since the previous inspection, ICT facilities have been greatly enhanced, use by pupils extensively increased and this is reflected in their gains in skills and understanding. New buildings house the sixth form but there is no school hall. Finances

are well managed. The deficit of recent years has been removed and the sixth form is financially self-sufficient. The school provides good value for money.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

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	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	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 are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I write to thank you for your help when we were conducting the inspection of your school. We spoke to a number of you in small groups but others we met in classrooms and around the school. You spoke warmly of life in the school and the way in which you contribute to the community outside the school as well as within.

We were impressed by your school and particularly by the progress it has made under your new headteacher, Mrs Comber, in the last year. Sir William Ramsay is a good school. This means that you and your fellow pupils are achieving well in external examinations at GCSE level and in the sixth form. Your school is a specialist arts school and it is thriving in this role. Some of the work here is outstanding and has deservedly been recognised nationally. It is also an integral and valuable part of the work the school does in the community. It all contributes to preparing you well for the next stage in your life.

Your school is constantly seeking to improve and everyone, including the teachers, support assistants and the school governors work hard on your behalf. We agree with the school in what needs to be done next in order to be an even better school. The school intends to offer more work-related courses and to use the expertise gained as a specialist arts school to benefit the work in other departments. Thank you again. It was a privilege to be guests in your school.