



Verulam School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117505
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280100
Inspection dates 11 January 2006 to 12 January 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. David Jones LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Brampton Road
School category	Community		AL1 4PR
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	01727766100
Number on roll	1123	Fax number	01727766256
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Bill Tindale
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr. David Kellaway

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 11 January 2006 - 12 January 2006	Inspection number 280100
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Verulam School, a specialist Technology College, is a boys 11-18 comprehensive with 1,123 pupils. It is located on the eastern side of St Albans, Hertfordshire and is larger than most secondary schools. The school is popular with parents and many pupils come from outside the local area. The socio-economic background of the pupils is favourable compared to the national picture. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. The pupils' attainment on entry is currently above average having improved in the last two years from a broadly average position. Pupils are mainly of White British heritage, although one in seven is from a minority ethnic background. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is marginally above average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. The proportion of pupils who come and go part way through the school year is low. This specialist school operates as part of a sixth form consortium with two other schools and a local college, and girls are admitted to Years 12 and 13 as part of these arrangements. The school achieved Sportsmark status in 2002 and a Healthy Schools award in 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school judges all aspects of provision to be good and inspectors agree. This is because senior managers rigorously identify aspects of the school that are not effective and do something about them. As a result, standards of attainment are above average and pupils make good progress overall. The quality of teaching is good but it is not always consistent throughout the school. The pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and sometimes outstanding. Although some parents report a lack of discipline, behaviour was good in almost all lessons. Attendance is above national figures. Many areas of the school require modernisation although the provision of new technology has made rapid progress. The small number of computers in some classes is limiting pupils' progress. The school gives good value for money. The school has made good progress since the last inspection and standards have improved after a dip in performance. Parental communication is not always effective. Leadership and management are good and the school's capacity to improve is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school judge the sixth form to be good and inspectors agree. The school is part of an effective sixth form consortium, to which it makes a significant contribution. Progress in the lessons seen was good. The consortium arrangement has led to an outstanding range of courses. As a result, pupil numbers, particularly the intake of girls, have grown steadily. The sixth form syndicate is rightly considering common assessment and reporting arrangements that will enable the progress of individuals to be monitored more closely. The retention and pass rates are good. Students in the sixth form act as very good role models. Leadership and management are good; managers deploy resources carefully to improve the quality of learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- continue to seek improvement in the quality of teaching to ensure that pupils make good progress in all lessons - seek support from the local authority to improve the learning environment - implement the school's good strategic plan for information and communication technology (ICT) - ensure the consistent implementation of the school's good behaviour management procedures - improve the consistency of communication with pupils and parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average and have improved in the last two years. The unvalidated 2005 Key Stage 3 results in English, mathematics and science are well above national figures. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress as a result of the effective support available in Key Stage 3. In lessons, progress is good and

sometimes outstanding. This is the result of improvements in teaching and the effective use of the new classroom technology available. Pupils in all year groups are gaining knowledge, skills and understanding at a good rate. The attainment on entry in Years 11 to 13 was broadly average. Standards are rising. The percentage of students who gain five or more higher GCSE grades is well above the national average. The school meets challenging targets. All pupils attained at least one GCSE level pass. In the sixth form standards of attainment have continued to improve. Attainment is above average in Year 12 and average in Year 13. Most subjects and courses perform well, and the school's robust assessment base confirms that all pupils make very good progress in English, design technology and modern foreign languages. However, the pupils' performance in mathematics is inconsistent.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that the pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Attendance has fluctuated recently but remains above average. Pupils have a positive attitude to the school. They are learning key literacy and numeracy skills that contribute effectively to their future economic well-being. There was a real sense of enjoyment in many lessons, pupils were keen to learn and clearly relished the process. The school is popular and over-subscribed. Almost all pupils said they were glad to be at the school and would happily recommend it to others. Behaviour was good in almost all lessons although some parents expressed concern. The school's behaviour guidelines are clearly understood and most pupils respect them. However, parents and pupils report a lack of discipline in some classes. However, relationships are good. A few parents report incidents of bullying, but pupils have said this is not a common occurrence. The opinions of pupils are regularly sought in the school council meetings and in regular questionnaires. Some parents and pupils feel that communication is weak, although the school has sought their views with good results, for example, regarding the new school development plan. Communication could be more consistent although it has improved in the last year. Pupils are encouraged effectively to lead a safe and healthy life. The school provides a very good programme of sports and activities. For example, it holds an award for healthy eating and pupils are given a good education on issues affecting their health and well-being. Pupils contribute well to activities the local area. The school band performs regularly in the community and the school's specialist technology status has been used to support the curriculum in local schools. There is a good programme of work experience and links with industry. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well planned and effective. Assemblies meet the requirements for collective worship. The personal development of sixth formers is good. Students are keen to attend and they are pleased with the education and support provided. Relationships with their teachers are very good and the pupils feel their opinions are sought and valued. Advice about careers and university is thorough and greatly appreciated.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and lessons are frequently outstanding. On these occasions, clearly structured work was explained in a lucid and concise manner. Imaginative, stimulating and well-paced teaching generated enthusiasm and interest. Pupils knew what was expected of them and were well prepared to successfully complete varied and demanding tasks. High quality questions challenged the pupils' thinking and extended their understanding. The effective use of interactive whiteboards, for example, to present information or analyse texts provided good assessment opportunities. Tasks were well matched to the pupils' differing learning needs. The pupils consistently responded in a positive manner to well structured intellectual, physical and creative challenges. The school council considers that some teaching is insufficiently interesting, and senior managers have correctly identified those aspects that are not effective in some lessons. Weaknesses include imprecise learning objectives and inconsistencies in implementing the school's behaviour management procedures. In several lessons, underdeveloped pupils' independent learning skills limited their progress. The school has started to teach these skills systematically. The school has recently established a clear system for tracking the progress made by each pupil against their National Curriculum or GCSE targets. This system is linked to termly reports but has not been in operation long enough to monitor the pupils' progress between year groups. Good use of assessment and marking was seen in design and technology, modern foreign languages and English. Senior managers are aware that the use of assessment is not yet consistent in all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The overall quality of the curriculum is good with some very good features. The curriculum issues from the last inspection have been addressed. Particular strengths include the good range of courses for science, design technology and modern foreign languages. The school's specialist technology status is evident in the quality and breadth of provision provided. Links with feeder schools are good and the technology faculty's strength is a significant aspect of the sixth form consortium. The teaching time pupils have for physical education and games is above average, and about one third of pupils take part in competitive sports. The range of examination courses offered benefits from the links with the other consortium schools, and includes an adequate variety of vocational courses. The courses for citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) are well organised, although some aspects of PSHE are not sufficiently effective. There are some good examples of the use of ICT to enhance learning in other subjects and this continues to be a priority in the school's development plan. Some ICT exam classes are taught in rooms that do not have enough computers. Out-of-class education is outstanding; for example, a large number of pupils follow

the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and 30 of these students visited New Zealand in the summer of 2005. They benefit from special teaching days in Years 9 and 10, which include contributions from an international bank and the University of Hertfordshire. In addition, groups of pupils are successful in local and regional competitions that require enterprise skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Inspectors support the school view that care, guidance and support are good. The necessary requirements for child protection and health and safety are well met. Pupils trust their teachers. They feel they give good support, listen and help. Staff have received extensive training in dealing with any incidents of bullying, and pupils' welfare is supported by a wide range of external agencies. The monitoring of pupils' work and academic guidance are good. The pupils work is regularly assessed and discussed with parents termly. Targets for academic achievement are well known and carefully followed up; personal guidance is good. Provision for those with learning difficulties and disabilities and for the gifted and talented is effective. These programmes are well led. However, the progress of all pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is not sufficiently monitored in classes where direct support is not provided. The school is very good at involving members of the wider community in the support it provides for pupils. Care and support are good in the sixth form. Tutors know their students well and are generous with their time and advice. Sixth formers provide support for younger pupils as trained counsellors in the PSHE programme. Sixth form careers and university guidance are well planned and thorough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Since his appointment in January 2005 the headteacher has reorganised the senior leadership team. Clear roles and responsibilities are helping to channel developments, raise standards, promote personal development and to secure the well-being of learners. There is a common sense of purpose among the staff. Effective self-evaluation takes account of the views of all major stakeholders. Managers have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. An effective school development plan has focussed on a limited number of key developments. A robust assessment database now informs provision. Effective observation of teaching and learning has been developed with support from the local authority. Significant improvements have been made in the provision of interactive classroom technology and electronic learning. This has helped meet the objectives contained within the school's specialist technology status. The successful completion of the school's good ICT development plan will complete this work. The management of parental communication is inconsistent. Significant efforts are made to provide information via newsletters and meetings but the school's responses to individual enquiries are seen by some parents to be too slow. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The school has played a significant part in the development

of the local consortium arrangement with three other centres. This arrangement has led to many improvements including an extension to the range of courses offered. The governance of the school is good. The governing body is well informed and good decisions have been made to enhance the teaching resources available. Although the school has experienced some recruitment difficulties, senior managers are rightly focussed on improving the quality of learning. The provision of specialist equipment is adequate although accommodation is in need of revitalisation. Financial resources are used effectively and the school gives good value for money. Managers at all levels clearly direct improvement and promote the well-being of learners through high quality care and education. The school's capacity to improve is good.

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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	2
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	2	2
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	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
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	insufficient evidence

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

Thank you for contributing to the inspection. It was good to meet you during my recent visit. I was very impressed by your behaviour, how positive you are about your school and your very good attitude to learning. I was particularly impressed by the way you enjoy lessons that challenge your creative, physical and intellectual talents. The skills we saw demonstrated in design technology, modern foreign languages and English were impressive, as was the sound of the band echoing down the corridor at lunchtime. I was pleased to receive the letters and telephone calls from your parents. Although I was unable to speak to all of them, I have tried to answer their questions in the report, so please give them my thanks. As I have just said, I believe there are many good things about your school to be celebrated but there are also ways in which it can improve. I have asked the headteacher and the governors to focus their efforts on ensuring you make good progress in all lessons. It is also important that they seek support from the local authority to improve the learning environment and continue the work initiated last year to improve the school's information and communication technology facilities. The school can further improve the quality of communication with you and your parents. As pupils you can make a significant contribution to these developments by developing the debate in the school council. I look forward to hearing about your future successes.