



Simon Balle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117519
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280106
Inspection dates 21 March 2006 to 22 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. David Jones LI

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

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|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Type of school | Secondary | School address | Mangrove Road |
| School category | Community | | SG13 8AJ |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01992 410400 |
| Number on roll | 1082 | Fax number | 01992 410401 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair of governors | Ms.Penny Tongue |
| Date of previous inspection | 10 January 2001 | Headteacher | Mrs. Alison Saunders |

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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

Simon Balle School is a mixed 11 - 18 comprehensive with 1082 pupils, located near the centre of Hertford. The school is of average size and popular with parents, notably so in the sixth form. Many pupils come from outside the local area and their socio-economic background compares favourably with the national picture. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. Attainment on entry is above average and pupil mobility is low. The pupils are predominately of White British heritage, with few pupils from a minority ethnic background. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very low. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a Statement of Special Educational Needs is below average. In 2004 the school achieved specialist status in the humanities and received a Sportsmark award. Re-accreditation in the Investors in People Award scheme was achieved 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

This is a good school with a number of outstanding features. The school gives good value for money and has made very good progress since the last inspection. Self-evaluation is outstanding, although senior managers' views on a number of areas of provision are more modest than the judgements given by HMI in this report. The school has correctly identified the aspects of provision which require further development, for example, limiting the variance in provision between some departments. The school's capacity to improve is outstanding. Leadership and management are outstanding. Senior managers have a realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have taken action to address those areas in need of development. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is outstanding and, as a result, the quality of teaching is good. Specialist school status in the humanities is helping to raise standards and provide models of good practice. The school works very effectively in partnership with others to promote the learners' well-being. Effective practice was seen in all curriculum areas. Standards of attainment are above average and all pupils make good progress. Assessment information is used effectively to inform management decisions and increasingly to enhance teaching and learning. The pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour are good and improving. Some parents have expressed concern about the behaviour of a small minority of pupils in Year 8; however, the school is taking appropriate steps to deal with this matter. The school parliament and the sixth form contribution to the school community are impressive. Personal development is good and the care, support and guidance provided is outstanding. Assemblies and tutorial periods do not always make good use of the opportunities for spiritual development. There are good relationships between pupils of all ages that are clearly evident in the many dramatic and musical opportunities available. Sixth form students support lessons in a number of areas, for example, music and geography. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is above average. The learning environment is well maintained and modern educational resources are deployed effectively.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school that the sixth form is outstanding. Most students make good progress and achieve above average examination results. Many take the opportunities provided to develop their leadership skills through involvement in the main school and the wider community. Members of the sixth form mentor younger pupils enthusiastically and responsibly. They take the lead in many cultural and sporting activities, the school parliament and in local primary schools, where they help teachers whilst on work placements. The sixth form curriculum is good. It meets students' needs effectively, provides a broad and balanced range of subjects with extensive enrichment, and makes a growing contribution to the local consortium of schools. Vocational subjects have been introduced and more are planned to meet the needs of year groups still in the main school. Teaching is good. The ethos is very friendly and extremely

supportive. Students receive outstanding help to develop personal qualities, guidance on their progress and future career opportunities. The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding, with a very clear vision for further development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Reduce the variance in provision between subjects by extending the very good practice established by the departments leading the school's specialist status. - Make better use of the opportunities to enhance spirituality and reflection through assemblies, tutorial time and the growing cultural provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry to the school is above average, as were the results of the 2005 Key Stage 3 national tests. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher grade in all three core subjects was well above the national figures. The percentage of students who gained five or more higher GCSE grades was well above the national average. Almost all pupils gained five or more pass grades, a figure well above average. The proportion of those who achieved five or more higher grade passes, including English and mathematics, compares favourably with other schools in the local authority and with schools nationally. Overall, pupils' progress was above average and the performance of girls was stronger than that of the boys. The school's specialist status in the humanities is having a positive effect on results across the curriculum. The school's results in geography, history, English, business studies, science and religious education were above the national figures; however, the results in design technology and mathematics were disappointing. The governing body sets each department challenging targets and these are consistently met. Achievement was above average in the majority of lessons, pupils were engaged in their own learning and tasks were carefully matched to their learning needs. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have clear targets that are regularly reviewed and they enjoy effective support that enables them to make good progress. Pupils' progress was satisfactory or better in all lessons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school has very effective systems for promoting pupils' personal development and well-being and as a result they are good. Attendance is above average and there is a consistent approach to monitoring behaviour that seeks to develop the pupils' self-esteem. Close monitoring of the pupils' personal development by dedicated and effective year teams provides opportunities and challenges for pupils to take the lead in a wide variety of situations. Pupils' responses are often mature and they express their enjoyment of innovative courses and tasks that help them to develop their leadership qualities and interpersonal skills. The school parliament is impressive and

pupils regard it as an important aspect of 'their voice' in the life of the school. A strong and very relevant inclusion policy matches the needs of all pupils and explores the social issues of harmony between groups within the school and society. The school actively promotes healthy life style decisions and the levels of participation in the well managed sports programme are high. The school parliament was a challenging audience for caterers during a recent focus on healthy eating. The parental questionnaires that formed part of this inspection were overwhelmingly positive regarding the pupils' personal development. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and has been integrated into department planning. However, the lack of co-ordinated monitoring of these aspects leads to missed opportunities that could have enhanced spiritual development to the same level as moral and social guidance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Pupils learn well because teaching is good in three quarters of all lessons. This confirms the school's view and shows that the senior leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching are accurate. A well managed programme of monitoring and evaluation provides robust information that forms the basis of effective staff support and development. In most lessons pupils learn well, make good progress and enjoy their work. Very good curriculum planning, supported by clear academic guidance, is a particular strength of the teaching. As a result lessons stretch pupils' thinking, facilitate challenging activities and maintain their interest. In nearly one fifth of lessons teaching was outstanding; on these occasions excellent curricular opportunities were delivered with verve and imagination. For example, in an outstanding geography lesson the pupils were able to write up the fieldwork they had recently completed in Barcelona on the school's lap top computers. In those lessons where the pupils encountered teaching that was satisfactory, constraints on the pace and challenge provided allowed boredom to limit progress. Assessment is used well to track pupils' progress and set appropriately challenging targets. Pupils who are not making enough progress are supported effectively. The quality of the tracking and the support provided helps pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities to make good progress. Overall, marking is thorough and provides pupils with clear information on what they need to do to improve. However, as with other aspects of provision, there are variations between subjects. The resources provided by the school's specialist status have helped to enhance teaching and improve standards. Information and communication technology (ICT) is being used effectively to enhance learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum for 11 - 16 year olds is good and offers a broad range of courses. Most are academic in nature but vocational courses have been successfully introduced. The school specialises in the humanities subjects and funding allows it to enrich teaching

and learning opportunities across the curriculum. Good ICT facilities, fieldwork and educational visits are combined with opportunities in the performing and visual arts. The curriculum extends into the community through citizenship projects where pupils visit local primary schools and help young children learn. All Year 10 and 11 pupils study a combined GCSE business communications and ICT course which provides a firm foundation for future curriculum choices. Careers guidance is good and work placements are provided in Year 10 and in the sixth form. An Africa Day and enterprise days are part of an outstanding personal, social, health and citizenship course. The curriculum is extended through an exceptional range of clubs and activities including music, sports, and drama, some produced by members of the sixth form. Most pupils participate in sports and musical activities, including instrumental lessons, choirs and bands. Pupils, parents and staff spoke highly of the recent 'Big Band' performance.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The pupils explained they are both nurtured and challenged by the school's outstanding approach to individual care, guidance and support. Very good access to relevant data allows pastoral staff to track pupils' progress and provide effective guidance at all stages of their education. Pastoral systems have been developed which include an appropriate emphasis on health and safety as a result of excellent communication between home, school and outside agencies. The principles behind the Every Child Matters legislation are evident even in chance encounters between staff and pupils. Well targeted professional development for all staff is influencing classroom and management decisions. For example, preparations are well advanced towards accreditation through the Healthy Schools Award. The inclusion policy is exemplarily embedded into practice and integral to the academic support and personal development provided to pupils of all abilities and all backgrounds. The special needs support team and learning mentors are very strong elements of the high profile pastoral team.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The headteacher has reorganised the work of the senior management team, introducing high expectations and clear direction. Self-evaluation is outstanding and takes into account the views of all major stakeholders. Senior and middle managers have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and work within clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The monitoring and evaluation of performance are outstanding. A rigorous programme of lesson observation and support has enhanced the quality of provision. Senior managers have made very good use of specialist school status to raise standards and develop the curriculum. The leadership of the sixth form is outstanding, with students full of praise for the care and support provided. The curriculum leadership of the departments within the school's specialism is very good. The confidence, imagination and debate they bring to the leadership of the school are significant assets. The leadership and management of the provision for pupils with

learning difficulties and disabilities are outstanding. Pastoral leadership is outstanding; consistently seeking improvement and the well-being of learners through high quality care and inclusion. The governance of the school is very good. Governors are alert to the opportunities to further enhance standards and provision. Equality of opportunity is secure and discrimination is tackled so that all learners make good progress as they move through the school. Outstanding links exist with parents and outside agencies. Resource management is very good and the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Financial management is outstanding and the school provides good value for money. The leadership of the school is intensely focused on raising standards, improving the educational provision available and enhancing the personal development and well-being of learners. The impact is seen in the progress made by all pupils, their sense of security and well-being. The leadership and management provide the school with outstanding capacity to improve.

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Inspection judgements

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|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | 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 | 1 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 | 1 |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage | NA | NA |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| 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 | 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; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 1 | 1 |
| 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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review | 1 | |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 | |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money | 1 | |
| 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

Thank you for contributing to the recent inspection of your school. It was good to meet you and see how much you enjoy the opportunities the school provides. We were impressed by the school parliament, your attitudes to learning and the respect you give to those you meet. Behaviour around the school is good and we were pleased with the way you bring problems to the attention of senior staff. We were particularly impressed by the way you enjoy lessons that challenge and involve you in your own learning. The skills we saw demonstrated in geography, leisure and tourism, physical education, English and music were impressive. We were pleased to receive the many letters from your parents and I have tried to answer their questions in the report, so please give them my thanks. There are many good things about your school to be celebrated but there are also ways in which it can improve. The headteacher and the governors agree that there are some variations in the opportunities provided for you between subjects and these can be improved to match the best available. Similarly, some of the opportunities for you to reflect on society and spirituality could be further enhanced. You can be involved in these initiatives and the headteacher will explain to the school parliament how this will happen. I am confident you will develop the debate. I look forward to hearing about your future successes.