

Stanborough School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117507
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290859
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Marianick Ellender-Gele HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1067
6th form	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Matthew Buckley
Headteacher	Mr Peter Brown
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2003
School address	Lemsford Lane Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire AL8 6YR
Telephone number	01707321755
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Stanborough School has specialist status for mathematics and computing. It is an average size secondary school. There are over one hundred more boys than girls on roll. The school has a sixth form with courses provided by a consortium of local schools and other providers. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and the number eligible for free school meals is below average. Few students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities is slightly below average. Students' attainment on entry at age 11 is broadly average. The school has received Healthy School and Investors in People awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Stanborough is a satisfactory school with many good and developing features, enabling it to continue to improve standards. The quality of the teaching, students' personal development and provision for care, support and guidance are good. The school has focused its energy on raising standards and improving achievement in Years 7 to 9 and this is now bearing fruit, with satisfactory progress and standards at age 14 matching the national average. The school has experienced much difficulty in recruiting staff over the past five years. This has affected the progress of older students and results at GCSE have been below average. Good appointments have now secured stability and quality of staffing. The senior leadership team knows where there are strengths and weaknesses in provision and standards. Improvement strategies are beginning to show positive impact. Current students make satisfactory progress overall and good progress in Year 11, with results predicted to improve significantly in 2007. The school manages very effectively the welfare and learning of students facing serious emotional or personal challenges in their life. Those who have learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress. Attendance is now average and behaviour is good. Students say that they enjoy their lessons and their attitudes to learning are good. Many lessons provide opportunities for them to do some interesting research and stimulate their thinking. Most students know what they need to do to improve their work, however, some feedback lacks specific focus, particularly for more able students, who are not consistently challenged or made aware of what to do to aim for the highest possible outcomes. The specialism in mathematics and computing has enriched the curriculum, resources and learning environment. Leadership and management are good. Over the past three years much has changed at the school and these changes have been managed effectively. Students commented that 'they liked the headteacher' and that 'he had made many good new things'. He has provided further momentum to the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders, including the leadership of the sixth form, improved teaching and appointed key staff to the leadership of subjects. Faculty leaders are reviewing the quality of provision, however there are still inconsistencies in the way subject leaders use these evaluations to improve students' achievement and standards. The issues of the previous inspection have been addressed well. Students are well cared for, feel safe and know how to be healthy. The year learning managers are very effective in their work. Governors play their part well in monitoring provision and standards. They and the staff are aware of the need to consolidate the school's performance. The school gives satisfactory value for money and demonstrates good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory with current students achieving as expected on their chosen courses. Examination results have been slightly below average and the school is striving to improve standards further through better teaching and resources and closer monitoring of its students, many of whom follow courses in the local sixth form consortium. The sixth form is well led by a senior manager who, with others, has established effective monitoring of students' progress. However, students express concern about the quality of provision in some areas of the consortium and its adverse effect on their progress. Inspectors agree with one student who suggested that 'interaction between different schools and college could be encouraged and teachers from different schools could get together'.

Students comment very positively on the strong sense of a sixth form community and while the majority study some subjects elsewhere, all play a full part in the life of Stanborough School. There is a strong prefect system, with all students sharing in school duties as well as organising charity events and acting as mentors for younger students. The curriculum is good because of the very wide choice of advanced level courses offered by the consortium. However, few courses meet the needs of less able students. Stanborough students praise the additional enrichment provided by the school which includes sports activities, social and personal development and leadership awards. Students are very well supported by staff and value much improved advice and preparation for university and employment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of subject leadership so that evaluation is used more rigorously and consistently to support whole school priorities targeted on raising standards.
- Improve challenge and feedback to more able students so that they are clear about what they need to do to reach the highest possible outcomes.
- Work with partners and providers to ensure that achievements and provision for sixth form students are consistently good across the consortium.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards at age 14 are in line with the national average and, although historically low at GCSE, with science and art results particularly weak in 2006, current students demonstrate satisfactory achievement with good progress in Year 11 and results predicted to reach the national average in 2007. Results are average but too few students reach the highest A*-C grades. Achievement in English, mathematics and science is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and the 2006 targets were met in these subjects. The school also met its specialist status targets in information and communications technology (ICT) at levels 5 and 6. For 14 to 16 year olds, achievement in some subjects is good, but not consistently so. Students who have learning difficulties or disabilities achieve well against the targets set for them. Faculties now have a much greater focus on raising standards but underperformance of some able students remains to be addressed. Progress in the sixth form is satisfactory. The specialist status of the school has improved outcomes and provision, especially in ICT and mathematics, with more students now continuing to study these subjects post-16.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development of students is good. They like coming to school and speak of the 'massive improvement' they feel has taken place in many aspects. Students develop positive relationships with their teachers and friends. Even though sixth form students have some of their studies in other schools and college, they show considerable responsibility in mentoring younger students, helping them to read and in their active involvement in charities and community work.

Attendance rates are in line with those of secondary schools nationally. The attendance of some students on GCSE courses has not always been high enough and has affected their results.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and the few students with behavioural concerns are managed well. Bullying and intimidation are very infrequent and resolved effectively. Students respond well to the school's incentives for them to eat healthily and adopt more active lifestyles through greater access to sports facilities.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Most students show considerable maturity in evaluating moral issues and this was illustrated well in some religious education work and a history lesson on the issue of wartime bombing of civilians. Students develop their skills for working life well and increasingly demonstrate very confident use of numeracy and ICT as a result of the much improved facilities. Literacy skills require consolidation. Economic awareness is similarly strong through effective careers education that includes work shadowing as early as Year 8.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Previous difficulties in recruiting and retaining quality teaching staff have affected achievement and results. The school recognised the urgent need to improve the quality of teaching and learning and this is now good. A valuable handbook on teaching, gathering of evidence of research and best practice, and accurate assessment and monitoring of lessons also contribute to this drive. However, the impact of this good practice is yet to influence achievement consistently and therefore progress is currently satisfactory. Teaching is often stimulating and students contribute fully in lessons. Year 11 students expressed how much they enjoyed a very good business studies lesson and said that they were very pleased with the good progress they are making. Teaching assistants are deployed well to help students who have learning difficulties to make good progress. Younger students said that the use of the interactive white boards, particularly in modern foreign languages and mathematics, helped them concentrate and learn better. Teachers' subject knowledge and their good preparation of a series of activities contribute to the good, and some outstanding, learning. However, challenge is, at times, insufficient to meet the needs of more able students and marking of written work is not always of consistently high quality.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good because staff use the extension of best practice across all years. However, students have expressed concerns about the unevenness of teaching quality across the consortium. Inspectors agree because some students are repeating work unnecessarily and the usefulness of assessment, particularly when lessons in the same subject are taught by different providers across the consortium, is not sufficiently exploited.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and gives students an enjoyable and enriching experience. It meets the needs of students of different abilities well and the school offers a variety of extension opportunities for its more able students, many in mathematics and ICT, as part of its specialism. However, not all subject departments plan sufficiently with the needs of potential higher achievers in mind. The school has been imaginative over curriculum-related

development. Changes to the school day and the curriculum have produced an innovative structure, thoughtfully designed to allow more time for GCSE courses, including further improvement to vocational and work-related provision. The school is rightly proud of Compass, a base that gives extra support to students at times of need, with evidence of much success when they reintegrate in the main school. The consortium arrangements for the sixth form enable it to offer a wide choice of advanced level courses, though lower-level courses are more limited. For the school as a whole, the extensive range of extra-curricular activities is warmly appreciated by students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Teachers are committed to helping students progress academically and develop personally. The school has a strongly inclusive climate, in which students feel safe and well looked after. Child protection arrangements are secure. Students can readily find members of staff to whom to turn in case of need. The school deals promptly and well with any rare cases of bullying. The school's clear code of behaviour, both in and out of class, is seen as fair by students. Students are satisfactorily guided towards their academic targets, but specific focus is required to enable all students to know how to improve in every subject, particularly for those capable of aiming for the highest GCSE levels. Year learning managers are very effective in guiding their teams of tutors and are working to improve the quality of tutorial time so that it is consistently good. The learning support team gives very good support to students with learning difficulties or disabilities and provides well devised individual plans. The school carefully inducts new entrants into Year 7. Students and parents receive thorough and helpful guidance over subject choices in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. Parents and carers are encouraged to be involved fully in the work of the school and have ample opportunities to discuss their child's progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. Students remarked that much has changed at the school for the better. The leadership team works together well to improve the school but consistency and high expectations are not yet reflected fully in the work of all faculties. Most middle managers are responding well to the drive to improve the school but some still have a way to go. Regular monitoring of students' progress and thorough reviews at line management meetings between senior leaders and middle managers all help sustain improvement. Inspectors agree with the leadership and management team's evaluation of standards, teaching and provision. However, key actions are not yet sufficiently enacted in all subjects, particularly those aiming to improve the rate of progress for higher achievers. Staff ensure that the climate for learning is good and that the school is calm and orderly. The school's specialist status has provided many useful opportunities for staff and students to work in the local community and with local primary schools. These events are managed very well. Governors make a good contribution to the development of the school and there is ample evidence of challenge, such as their questions

and discussions on improving outcomes at GCSE and provision post-16. The budget is monitored rigorously and resources are properly deployed.

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Annex A

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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
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	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	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	3	

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?	2	2

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

Annex A

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	3	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

19 March 2007

Dear Students

Stanborough School, Lemsford Lane, Welwyn Garden City AL8 6YR

I am writing on behalf of the inspectors who visited your school on 14 and 15 March to thank you for making us so welcome and talking to us during your lessons, around the school and in discussions at different times of the day. We are pleased to tell you that we found Stanborough School satisfactory with many good features. We agree with those of you who told us that the headteacher and staff have made alterations to the way the school is run which are improving it.

Here are some of the best things we found about your school.

- Teaching is good and engages you well in active and interesting lessons.
- You are provided with a good selection of courses to meet your needs.
- Staff care for you well and want to do their best for you.
- Your behaviour around the school and in lessons is good.
- You know what you have to do to be healthy and the school promotes this well.
- You are making satisfactory progress and the current Year 11 make good progress.

The school is already working on the aspects that need improvement. These include:

- improving your standards and the rate at which you progress over your five years at Stanborough school. You can help by asking how you could improve and reach higher grades, particularly if you are already very good in one or more subjects and feel you could do even better.
- making sure that all subjects are led well so that teaching and provision are good in all lessons.

Finally, we listened to sixth form students who say that they are concerned about progress across the consortium and want to do well wherever their course is taking place. We agree with these views and, again, sixth formers can help by discussing this with the school.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Marianick Ellender-Gele

Her Majesty's Inspector