



The Leventhorpe School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117588
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290884
Inspection dates 16–17 November 2006
Reporting inspector Jennifer Brown HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Cambridge Road
School category	Foundation		Sawbridgeworth
Age range of pupils	11–18		Hertfordshire CM21 9BY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01279 836633
Number on roll (school)	1075	Fax number	01279 600339
Number on roll (6th form)	241		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Roger Beeching
		Headteacher	Mr Peter Janke
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	16–17 November 2006	290884

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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

The Leventhorpe School serves the relatively affluent local community of Sawbridgeworth and the surrounding villages. The sixth form draws more heavily on the population of Harlow. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, with learning difficulties and disabilities, and statements of special educational need are low. The school has had specialist Business and Enterprise status since 2004. The prior attainment of pupils is above the national average and rising.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the school is good with some outstanding aspects. Parental confidence in the school is high and summed up by one parent who said, 'The school is led by a strong and visioned team of staff and governors who work hard to achieve their aims'. Standards at each key stage are high. Good progress has been made since the last inspection to raise standards at Key Stage 4. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*- C grades at GCSE has improved from 57% to 75% over the last five years, twice the national average rate of improvement. In 2006, pupils made good progress, but their progress over time has been more variable. Higher ability pupils usually make good progress and benefit from a wide ranging programme of events and activities, although their needs are not met equally well in all lessons.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding, as is the care support and personal guidance they receive. Pupils have very positive attitudes towards each other and adults in the school. They develop into extremely mature, thoughtful and responsible young people. Pupils are guided effectively toward healthy lifestyles. They feel very safe and report that any instances of bullying are dealt with quickly and constructively. Behaviour is excellent because most pupils know and respect the boundaries set by the school. Attendance is well above average and pupils are punctual to school and lessons.

Curriculum provision is outstanding. The business and enterprise specialist status of the school has been influential in extending curricular provision and in enabling greater flexibility for pupils to embark upon a wider range of qualifications. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Senior managers have put considerable effort into developing the teaching skills of the staff and this has resulted in improvements in standards. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is systematic but the current system puts too much emphasis on what the teacher is doing and not enough on the learning of pupils of all abilities. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are very conducive to learning. Lessons are generally well structured and planned and effective action has been taken to improve teachers' use of assessment in setting challenging targets for pupils. There are good systems for evaluating standards pupils' progress. Whilst most pupils know how well they are doing and clear about what they need to do to improve, the school recognises there is still some inconsistency in academic guidance between subjects.

The school benefits from effective leadership and management. Recent appointments to the senior management team have strengthened its capacity to drive forward improvements. Steps have been taken to increase the rigour of line management and this has had a positive impact on standards. However, lines of communication and accountability between senior and middle managers are not sharp enough. They do not yet ensure consistency in practice aimed at bringing about and maintaining improvement by different faculty managers. The governing body discharges its responsibilities very well.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The school's specialist status has had the effect of improving the quality of provision. An extensive range of advanced level courses and a small number of vocational courses are augmented by further choices offered through a consortium arrangement with other local schools. The quality of teaching and the progress of students are closely monitored. There is a concerted drive for teachers to develop further a range of teaching strategies to best engage the students in their learning. At the same time, students are encouraged to develop independent learning and other study skills to maximise success at school and to establish work habits that will ensure success in future life. Sixth form students make a very substantial contribution to the school and the wider community through organising house activities, acting as 'reading buddies' and fundraising for a variety of local and national charities. A detailed tutorial programme, which includes guidance and support for progression to higher education, promotes high aspirations and secures the outstanding personal development of students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching by monitoring more closely the quality of pupils' learning in lessons.
- Ensure that teachers use assessment information consistently to guide and meet the needs of all, but especially the most able, learners.
- Strengthen the lines of communication and accountability between senior and middle managers in order to consolidate improvements in pupils' achievement across all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are very high and achievement is good. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are significantly above average. The unvalidated results for 2006 are very impressive, with over half of the pupils gaining a Level 6 or above and these have reversed a trend of decline in this key stage. Pupils enter the school with above average standards and make good progress through Years 7 to 9. Though progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is inconsistent, mathematics is a constant strength.

During Years 10 and 11, high standards have been maintained and pupils' achievement in 2006 was good. However, achievement over time is variable and there are significant differences in performance between subjects. Achievement in mathematics continues to be strong for all pupils; performance in design and technology, history, information and communication technology (ICT), science and vocational subjects are also notable strengths. The recently introduced business and communications systems course is

supporting good achievement through Years 9 to 11. Standards in the sixth form are above average and improving. The progress of students is good as a consequence of good teaching and well motivated students who are keen to be at the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils enjoy school and are very keen to learn, particularly when engaged by interesting lessons. Their excellent behaviour and thoughtfulness towards each other leads to an extremely harmonious atmosphere throughout the school. Pupils report how pleased they are with the wide variety of interesting activities available to them, in which they participate in large numbers. They fully understand how to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles. They know the benefits of regular exercise and make sensible choices over their consumption of food and drink. They willingly grasp the many opportunities to exercise responsibility and initiative and so make an outstanding contribution to school life. The school council is very active and pupils of all ages identify many areas where they have made a difference. Sixth form students have particularly positive attitudes and successfully take responsibility for their learning. Older pupils have many opportunities to support younger pupils, for example as 'active listeners'. They are prepared extremely well for the next stages of their education and develop financial and enterprise skills that equip them for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils respond extremely well to their teachers' high expectations of the standard of work and of their conduct in lessons. Relationships between pupils and teachers are positive: consequently, there is an excellent climate for pupils to achieve well and to be secure in their learning in most lessons. Teachers use their subject expertise well to meet the demands of the national tests and examinations and this results in high standards of attainment. Where teaching is especially strong, teachers cater very well for the different ways that pupils learn. Activities and questioning are closely matched to pupils' abilities to ensure all pupils are challenged to achieve their potential.

However, this practice is inconsistent across the school, particularly for higher attaining pupils. Many teachers make effective use of ICT to present information and to make lessons interesting by involving pupils in demonstrating their understanding. Pupils are positive about current assessment procedures and their role in them. Most know the standards they achieve and what they need to do in order to improve but there is inconsistent practice both within and between subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school offers an outstanding curriculum, which fully meets the needs of all learners. The range of examination subjects on offer is well matched to the needs and aspirations of students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The school uses its specialist status very well to enhance learning and to make rapid improvements in pupils' ICT skills. All pupils undertake an accredited business and communications systems course and take part in enterprise activities, which lay extremely firm foundations for future economic well-being. Pupils are encouraged to be healthy, stay safe and make appropriate career choices by an effective personal development programme. The curriculum has been broadened considerably since the previous inspection by the introduction of vocational courses and consortium arrangements with other schools and a college of further education. There is exceptionally good provision for gifted and talented pupils, underpinned by a wide ranging programme of extended learning and links with the National Academy for Gifted and Talented, higher education institutions and local businesses. Extra-curricular provision and enrichment activities are significant strengths. Pupils really value their many chances to take part in sport, musical activities, drama and educational visits.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Parents are delighted that children's well-being is central to the school's work. There is outstanding provision in this area, which contributes to pupils' progress and enjoyment. Procedures to secure pupils' safety and well-being are thorough and meet current requirements. Child protection arrangements are robust and understood by all staff. The house system is a particular strength because it generates a strong family atmosphere in which pupils feel they are known and cared for. Consequently, they are very confident that they have someone to turn to who will listen to them and help if they have a problem. Arrangements for settling pupils into the school, for supporting them through each transition, including into the sixth form, and for providing carefully planned careers guidance are excellent and are much valued by pupils and their parents. Notwithstanding a degree of inconsistency in some subjects, pupils generally know of how well they are doing and how to meet their targets. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties are identified carefully and monitored closely. Performance data is carefully tracked and well-focused support is provided for those falling behind or for those needing extending by virtue of their particular talents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. Senior managers work hard and, together with governors, have been influential in improving standards and developing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The school is well-placed to improve further because recent senior management appointments have strengthened the team and monitoring and evaluation systems have been improved. However, although management is more rigorous, lines of accountability between senior and middle managers are not robust enough to ensure that key policies are put into practice consistently by all faculty managers. As a result, improvements in standards and achievement have yet to be consolidated in some subject areas. The multi-faculty teaching and learning group is a good catalyst for changing approaches to learning and teaching. However, the school's current system for monitoring and spreading good practice is not reinforcing the excellent work of this group. The governing body has a very good understanding of strengths and weaknesses of the school. It uses a variety of effective mechanisms to monitor and challenge what is happening.

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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
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	1	

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?	1	1
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 to below 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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

20 November 2006

Dear Pupils and Students

The Leventhorpe School, Cambridge Road, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire, CM21 9BY

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the judgements we made about your school. Thank you very much for making us so welcome and for the way in which you shared your views with the inspection team both within lessons and in formal and informal meetings with us.

The inspection found that The Leventhorpe School is a good school and some aspects of its work, such as the curriculum, the support and guidance it provides and the way it looks after your well-being and encourages you to follow a healthy life-style, are outstanding. Your parents tell us, and we agree that the school has a strong team of staff and governors who work hard to achieve their aims. They have been successful in ensuring examination results are consistently high and that you make good progress while you are at the school. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good, as is your attendance and punctuality. You have excellent attitudes to learning. You told us how much you appreciated the opportunities to help others in the school community and enjoy taking part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Sixth formers make an excellent contribution to helping young pupils to settle and to progress well.

For the school to be even more successful, we believe senior staff need to monitor more closely in lessons how well you are all learning and to ensure the work is sufficiently challenging for all of you. You told us that you value the information you are given about the levels and grades you are working at and the advice you are given about how to improve your work, but that this does not happen consistently in all subjects. I encouraged senior staff to talk more frequently to faculty heads individually to share good practice in developing teaching and learning and monitoring progress in their areas so there is greater consistency across the school and improvements can be maintained.

You attend a good school which is well on the way to being an outstanding school and you are right to be proud of it.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Brown (Her Majesty's Inspector)