

# Ansford School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123865
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	292822
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 September 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Nick Green HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	679
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Arthur Llewellyn
<b>Headteacher</b>	Robert Benzie
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 May 2002
<b>School address</b>	Maggs Lane Castle Cary BA7 7JJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01963 350895
<b>Fax number</b>	01963 351357

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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 school is smaller than average and located in a rural area. It has been a specialist mathematics and computing school since 2003. The great majority of students are White British; a very small minority are from other white, mixed race and minority ethnic families. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is well below average and the socio-economic background of most students is advantaged. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the number with a formal statement of special educational need are below average. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

'Learning to lead our lives' is the school's motto and the experiences students gain at Ansford enable them to do this effectively. The quality of education and care provided by the school is good. By the end of Year 9 students' standards are broadly average but rise by the end of Year 11 to be generally above average. In relation to students' starting points when they enter the school, their progress and achievement are good. No group of Year 11 students underperforms and the school has been effective this year in raising boys' achievement and the standards of the most able students. There is still room for improvement in Year 9 students' standards in the core subjects, particularly in English. The school is introducing a range of initiatives to do this.

After an unsettled period, when students' enjoyment and achievement were adversely affected by significant staff turnover, the clear direction of the headteacher and the effectiveness of the relatively new senior leadership team have raised the morale of staff and students and set clear expectations for continuing improvement. These are focused firmly on raising achievement and standards. The school's accurate self-evaluation effectively identifies its key areas for development and shows that it has a good capacity for further growth and improvement. The key issues raised in the last inspection report have been tackled successfully. The great majority of parents are supportive of the school and feel they are consulted; a small minority are concerned about students' behaviour and say that the school does not seek their views or those of their children. However, inspectors judge that the school does take good account of parents' and students' views and behaviour is good.

Students' personal development and well-being and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. They enjoy school, are well behaved, adopt healthy lifestyles and feel safe. Many make significant contributions to the local community and beyond. Students also develop secure competence in workplace and enterprise skills. The school provides a good level of care, guidance and support for all students, particularly the most vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Suitable arrangements are in place for safeguarding students.

Teaching and learning are generally good across the school. Teachers communicate learning objectives clearly to students and their secure subject expertise is utilised well in their thorough planning and teaching. However, sometimes students are not enthused or challenged sufficiently and their attention diminishes. Academic guidance is satisfactory. However, the use of assessment to inform teaching and learning and the use of feedback and marking to provide guidance to students on how to improve their work are uneven across staff. The school's curriculum is good, and meets the full range of students' needs and capabilities well. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities enriches students' learning and makes a valuable contribution to their enjoyment, to their personal development and to their achievement. The school's specialist status is beginning to have a beneficial impact on its curriculum.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise students' achievement and standards, particularly in English in Year 9, through more consistently inspiring teaching that effectively enthuses and challenges all students.
- Ensure that assessment is used consistently by all staff to inform their planning for teaching and learning in order to meet the needs of all students more effectively.

- Ensure that all staff use feedback and marking consistently to provide clear guidance to students on what they need to do to improve their work.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards in Year 9 at the end of the last academic year were above average in mathematics and science but below average in English. In science, the percentage of students gaining higher levels in the national tests was well above average. Given the starting points of the students when they join the school, their progress and achievement are satisfactory by the end of Year 9. Standards in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 have generally been above average for the last two years. Students' attainment in several foundation subjects is well above average particularly in the number gaining A\* and A grades. In relation to students' attainment when they enter the school, their progress and achievement are good by the time they leave. Standards and progress were also good in the lessons seen during the inspection. Most groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress and boys' performance improved considerably this year because of the effective additional support and guidance they received.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Students enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their very high level of attendance and their good behaviour in lessons and around the school. They participate enthusiastically in the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer. In lessons, they are attentive and keen to express their opinions. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Strong links with a school in Zambia enable them to deepen their understanding of other cultures and commitment to racial equality.

As they progress through the school, students develop into mature and articulate young citizens. They display very positive relationships with staff and their peers. Many students make outstanding contributions to school life, for example by acting as prefects and counselling their peers. Members of the 'student voice' groups and school council have been very effective in improving aspects of the school such as the canteen. Students feel safe and are confident that the little bullying that occurs is dealt with effectively. They have an excellent understanding of keeping themselves safe both in and outside of school. They also appreciate the healthy meals in the canteen and the wide range of sporting activities available, which enable them to adopt very healthy lifestyles. Fund raising for local and national charities, organising music and drama events and participation in the United Kingdom Youth Parliament exemplify the positive contributions students make to the community. They prepare effectively for their future economic well-being through a range of workplace skills and enterprise-related activities.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Students learn well in most subjects because the teaching they receive is effective. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well to give clear explanations and illustrations. Lessons are planned thoroughly and teachers generally share the aims of the lesson fully. Teachers usually provide a good balance of activities that allow for listening, thinking, as well

as doing, and maintain a very active, stimulating and orderly learning environment. In these lessons, students make fast progress and they are monitored closely to ensure they achieve well. Sometimes, students lose interest when teaching is uninspiring, lacks challenge and learning objectives have not been clearly shared. A minority of teachers do not offer sufficient opportunity for students to stretch themselves fully.

Most teachers across all subjects are aware of the learning needs of their students and they tailor their lessons closely to these needs. However, a minority of teachers have not fully grasped the importance of using assessment to inform their planning for teaching and learning and this practice is not yet embedded in all lessons. Marking and feedback are effective in making students aware of how well they are doing but they are not always given clear guidance on how to do better. Homework is used well to finish off work from class and consolidate students' learning, although it is not always used as effectively to extend it.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum provides opportunities for all students to enjoy a broad and balanced education and to progress and develop well. Students have a good range of GCSE courses to choose from, including vocational qualifications, such as in leisure and tourism. A small number follow a very well planned and taught alternative range of courses of work-based learning along with academic study. These students receive a course that is individually planned around their needs. The school has excellent links with other institutions to support this 'Partnership Curriculum'. Links with other countries support subject teaching well. Reflecting the school's specialist status, the recent creation of the Ansford Learning Gateway, a secure access, web-based learning facility, enables students to access the curriculum and learn 'anywhere, any time'.

The school provides students with a wide variety of activities outside the normal school day in performing arts, sports, subject clubs and creative areas like photography or designing a 'Green Car'; participation rates are high. Enterprise education is strong. The excellent range of activities that enrich the curriculum contributes much to students' enjoyment and achievement.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school is rightly proud of the pastoral support it provides for students. Good induction procedures for Year 7 students help them settle in quickly. As one new parent wrote about her daughter, 'She comes back from school every day happy and stimulated, wanting to tell us about her lessons and experiences'. Parents and carers of vulnerable children are similarly complimentary about the effective support given to students who are disaffected or at risk of exclusion. Staff work closely with outside agencies to provide this support. Students are confident they can turn to their teachers and support assistants if they are worried or upset and say their concerns are resolved well. Staff have received relevant training in child protection and the safeguarding of students meets requirements. Good attention is paid to students' health and safety.

The school has successfully increased levels of attendance and decreased rates of exclusion but is not complacent and continues to strive to improve these aspects. Assessment data is used well to set and review targets for students. However, the inconsistency in the amount of guidance given to students about how they can improve their work reduces the effectiveness of academic guidance. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good

support from specialist staff whose individual education plans for these students contain useful strategies to help them meet their targets. Students appreciate the extensive careers guidance they receive about the pathways they can follow after leaving school.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good at all levels. The headteacher provides clear strategic vision and direction for the school. Over recent years, he has clearly analysed the school's areas for development and introduced suitable strategies to address them. After a period of significant turnover of staff, including both senior and middle leaders and managers, a competent leadership team has been established that executes its responsibilities effectively with the current stable staffing. Middle managers have been developed and supported successfully. Morale has been improved and staff share and support the headteacher's drive for raising standards.

The school's self-evaluation procedures take good account of the views of students, parents and staff and result in accurate identification of strengths and areas for development. Effective systems to monitor and improve the performance of teachers are used. The leadership of the school sets challenging targets to raise standards; however, while some are realistic and able to be met, others have been too ambitious. The school's leaders are effective in promoting equality of opportunity and the personal development and well-being of all students. Under tight financial restraints, the school uses its resources effectively and efficiently to achieve value for money. For example, the redevelopment of school spaces to create a performing arts centre, the new canteen and outdoor areas have enhanced the quality of accommodation and the general school environment considerably.

Governors are kept well informed about the school's performance and they use this information to both challenge and support the school. They have good opportunities to contribute to strategic planning and monitor the progress of school improvement.





## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

24 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Ansford School, Castle Cary, BA7 7JJ.

Thank you for the help you provided the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting members of year groups and we learned a great deal from our discussions with many of you in lessons and around the school.

Your school provides good education and care. Standards are average in Year 9 and above average in Year 11. Last year, students' progress and achievement were good when they left the school in relation to their starting points when they entered. We were pleased to see that the boys' performance improved. Your progress and achievement were good in the lessons we saw during the inspection. However, there is still room for Year 9 students to do better in English. You learn well because the teaching you receive is effective. Your teachers have good subject knowledge, plan well and most lessons are stimulating and orderly.

Your personal development and well-being are good. You enjoy school very much and feel safe in the calm atmosphere that exists around the school. We clearly saw the pride you show in your roles as representatives on the school council, as prefects, as peer mentors and through the significant contributions you make to the community. The quality of the care, guidance and support you receive from staff is good, particularly for those of you who find learning difficult. The curriculum you receive meets the full range of students' needs and there is an outstanding range of enrichment activities in which many of you participate. The guidance you receive on your progress is satisfactory but teachers' use of assessment to inform this and the advice they give on how to improve your work is inconsistent.

The clear direction and effective leadership and management of the headteacher and senior teachers underpin the school's success. In order to improve further, we have asked the school to raise achievement and standards, particularly in English in Year 9, through more consistently inspiring teaching that challenges you to do your best. Additionally, that assessment should be used more consistently by teachers in their planning and teaching to meet your needs more effectively. You should also be given more consistent guidance on what you need to do to improve your work. You can really help by striving to do your very best in tests and examinations. Best wishes with your studies.

Nick Green Her Majesty's Inspector

## Annex B



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Best wishes with your studies.

Nick Green  
Her Majesty's Inspector