



St Laurence School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126472
Local Authority Wiltshire
Inspection number 293565
Inspection dates 10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector Andrew Harrett HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Ashley Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Bradford-on-Avon
Age range of pupils	11–18		BA15 1DZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01225 309500
Number on roll (school)	1179	Fax number	01225 309570
Number on roll (6th form)	189		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Bill Matthews
		Headteacher	James Colquhoun
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	10–11 January 2007	293565

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

St Laurence School has International School status and is an Investor in People. The school is a specialist college in the performing arts and has Artsmark Gold. The proportion of the pupils entitled to free school meals is below the national average. Fewer than average pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school. Standards on entry are above average and the pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 11, generally maintaining above average standards. In the sixth form, standards are above average and the students make good progress.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. The school's Christian ethos is clearly reflected in assemblies and in the quality of the care provided for the pupils. Sixth form students enjoy working as mentors for younger pupils. A large proportion of the pupils participate in the highly valued '3-2-5' programme of after-school activities. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall with good features in both the cultural and moral aspects. A high proportion of the pupils participate in activities linked to the school's specialist status in the performing arts and its International School status. Many pupils take part in a very wide range of cultural activities such as charity work in Romania and the Gambia, links with schools abroad and educational visits. However, this positive picture of school life is sometimes marred by the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils.

The satisfactory curriculum is enriched by the wide range of activities and generally meets the needs of most pupils. However, the limited range of vocational opportunities does not match the requirements of all the pupils and this adversely affects the attitudes to learning of some of them. Although the specialist status enriches the opportunities for personal development in the school and enhances the school's links with business and the community, the range of courses on offer in subjects related to the performing arts is limited and the impact on improving teaching and learning across the school is inconsistent.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. In the main school, the quality is variable, ranging from outstanding to inadequate. This inconsistency prevents the learning from being better than satisfactory overall.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory with some good features, particularly in the quality of care for the more vulnerable pupils. The school has developed appropriate systems to track and support pupils' academic and personal development. However, the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress is not yet implemented across all year groups or faculties, limiting the effects on achievement. The marking of pupils' work and feedback on how they can improve their performance are also inconsistent across subjects, although there are examples of good practice.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. There have been substantial improvements in the monitoring and evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the suitability of actions to improve provision. However, many of the planned initiatives are in their early stages. Based on the outcomes so far, the capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards and achievement in the sixth form are good. Nearly all the students who start studying in the sixth form complete their courses and they make good progress. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The school is not complacent about the provision, reviews it regularly and makes appropriate changes when necessary. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good, characterised by teachers' good knowledge of their subjects and expertise, which give the students confidence in their learning. The increasing variety of teaching and learning styles is a key feature in securing above average standards. The students' progress is monitored well and they speak highly of the support they receive. Although the curriculum is good and serves the students who stay on after Year 11 well, it is insufficiently broad to attract a higher proportion of students into Year 12. However, most students stay in education on suitable courses after Year 11, either at St Laurence or with other local providers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality and improve the consistency of teaching and learning.
- Use assessment data more precisely to set challenging targets, track pupils' progress, and plan work for individual pupils.
- Promote positive attitudes by engaging pupils in their learning and ensuring that the curriculum responds to all their needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards in the school are good and the achievement of the pupils is satisfactory. All groups of pupils make satisfactory progress. When the pupils enter the school, their standards are above average and remain so at the end of Key Stage 3. In the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2006, standards dipped in English and mathematics but remained above average. In science, standards rose, continuing the upward trend of recent years, and were well above average.

At Key Stage 4, standards have been consistently above average in the past but they dipped in 2006 and were broadly average. The proportion of pupils attaining five good GCSE grades was 67% in 2005 and 52% in 2006. However, these year groups entered the school with different levels of attainment and, although the progress made in 2006 was not as good as in 2005, achievement in both years remained satisfactory. Not all the pupils met the very challenging targets set for them by the school.

Standards in the sixth form are above average. With very few exceptions, the pupils pass their examinations at A level and the proportion of higher grades is above the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most pupils participate in the range of clubs and societies available in the school and are involved in the charitable events held throughout the year. The improvement of the physical environment in the 'Restaurant', with its nutritious menu at break and lunchtimes, has had a positive influence on the pupils' understanding of a healthy diet and on the choices that they make. They participate well in year councils and the school council and these have made a difference to the school, with improvements to the school's recycling system and suggestions for the improvement of the site being implemented.

Attendance is satisfactory. The school uses a range of effective strategies to monitor attendance and there are encouraging signs of improvement. Pupils feel safe in school and they value the support available to them outside lessons. Behaviour is satisfactory overall, although some behaviour during breaks and lunchtimes is boisterous and immature. In addition, some parents and pupils expressed concerns about the disruptive influence of a minority of pupils in lessons upon the learning of others. Although behaviour in the school is satisfactory overall, some instances of this were observed by the inspection team.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. The school recognises there is too much variation in the quality of teaching and learning. Typically, pupils encounter teaching that can vary widely from outstanding to inadequate. In the best lessons, teaching is fast paced and involves pupils in a variety of activities which challenge them with keen and searching questioning. In these lessons, the pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress. They cooperate well with each other and behave well. On the other hand, expectations are not always high enough. These lessons are undemanding and opportunities are missed to give students more responsibility for their own learning. As a result, they learn more slowly than they should and their motivation deteriorates. Occasionally this leads to disruption that affects the learning of others. Although there are examples of good practice in marking and the use of assessment data, this is inconsistent across the school. Assessment information is not always shared with sufficient clarity with the pupils and does not inform lesson planning with enough precision.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. It is enriched by a good range of popular activities. These are a strong feature of the school's provision, reflected in its specialist status in performing arts, Artsmark Gold Award and its International School status. The structured programme of outdoor education is well established and supported. Although the curriculum in the main school meets statutory requirements, the vocational element is limited and this has an adverse impact on the motivation, engagement and achievement of some pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The provision in this area is satisfactory with some good features. Child protection procedures are in place and the school works with a wide range of professionals to safeguard pupils. Risk assessments are carried out thoroughly and effective practice in health and safety ensure a safe environment for all. Checks on staff meet government requirements.

Pupils receive appropriate advice on GCSE options and the range of opportunities for post-16 study. This enables them to make informed choices for the future. In order to improve home-school study support for Years 10 and 11, the school is running two information days this year for parents and pupils on 'Getting the most out of your GCSEs'.

Pupils make use of professionals who provide counselling on issues such as sexual health and other personal problems. A range of effective strategies is also used for vulnerable pupils, including the funding of a community school nurse and mentors from within and outside the school. The learning needs of all pupils are assessed well upon entry to the school and recently implemented literacy and numeracy 'catch-up' sessions are showing positive results on pupils' skills and their self-esteem. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are offered a range of tailored learning support programmes. They are supported well by well trained staff and there is a social area for vulnerable youngsters. Staff are informed of issues relating to learning difficulties and, as a result, these pupils make satisfactory progress.

Assessment is satisfactory. Pupils are beginning to know what their standards are and what they need to do to improve. The school has improved its use and analysis of data but there continue to be inconsistencies between its use in different subjects and inconsistent understanding and application of levels, grades and targets to help pupils improve. In the sixth form, teachers give good feedback to students so that they know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Staff training is properly focused on improving identified areas for development. Improved arrangements for monitoring the work of the school, including a programme of faculty reviews, is providing an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school is also monitoring the quality of teaching and learning systematically and accurately. The senior team are working together with increasing effectiveness and communication between them and the heads of faculty is improving. The ability of middle leaders to take responsibility for raising standards is improving, but their implementation and interpretation of school policy remain inconsistent, particularly with regard to assessment, target setting and tracking. The governing body is committed to improving the quality of provision in the school and provides good challenge and support. The school is taking effective steps to seek the views of pupils and parents in the evaluation of its work and to consider these appropriately in their planning. However, many of these developments are as yet not fully in place and their impact is consequently patchy. The embryonic stage of their implementation, and in some cases the inconsistencies that persist in practice, have so far prevented their impact on achievement being more than satisfactory.

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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?	3	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	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
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?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
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

Thank you for the welcome and help that you gave us when we recently visited your school. You provided us with a lot of useful insights. We think that your school is satisfactory overall and that the sixth form is good. These are the main findings from the inspection:

- A real strength of the school is the range of clubs and activities.
- In the sixth form, students make good progress in their learning. Teaching and the support available to students in the sixth form are good.
- In Years 7 to 11, you make satisfactory progress which is similar to that made by pupils like you in other schools.
- The teaching in the main school is satisfactory overall. Some of it is very good, but it is variable and this makes it harder for you to make good progress. Also, the marking and assessment of your work varies.
- Although the curriculum is satisfactory, there are not enough vocational subjects to interest all of you.
- Most of you behave well and want to learn, but the poor behaviour of some of you occasionally spoils your education and disrupts that of other pupils.

All schools can improve. We have asked the school to:

- Make the teaching more consistently good.
- Monitor your progress carefully and make sure that you know how to improve your work.
- Make sure that lessons and the choice of subjects on offer motivate and interest all of you.

The teachers cannot do this on their own. Everyone in the school must work together to make sure that all of you can get the best out of school.