

# Sands School

Independent School

Inspection report

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DfES Registration Number	878/6042
Unique Reference Number	113619
Inspection number	301596
Inspection dates	2-3 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## Information about the school

Sands School is located in the town of Ashburton in Devon and provides education for young people aged 11-17 years. The school's education is based on the philosophy of democratic schooling: 'which puts students' social and emotional development at the heart of learning, to equip each young person to be an effective and contributing member of a free democratic society'. It is registered with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to admit up to 81 students. Currently 54 students are on roll, four of whom have a statement of special educational need. Several have failed to thrive in their previous schools. Most places are privately funded, although a small number are funded by a charitable trust or by students' local authorities. This is the first full inspection since the school opened in 1987.

## Evaluation of the school

Sands School is successful in meeting its primary aims. It provides a good quality of education and its provision for art and drama is outstanding. The school's distinctive focus on discussion and making decisions democratically is very effective in promoting students' personal development, which is outstanding. Students become confident and expressive learners and make good progress. Teaching is satisfactory with some good and outstanding features. However, assessment information is not used consistently to check students' progress and to match work closely to their individual needs. Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is inadequate since the school does not meet several key regulations in this area. The school also fails to meet a number of other requirements for continued registration.

## Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced and takes close account of the National Curriculum. Provision for art and drama is outstanding as a result of the stimulating courses which are responsive to students' individual needs and interests. A relatively large proportion of time is allocated for discussion and making decisions democratically which is consistent with the school's aims. Planning is in place for all subjects, although there is a lack of detail in some subjects. Students have the opportunity to undertake practical topics in woodwork, art and design and cookery, although design and technology is not taught as a discrete

subject. Students are taught in small groups, rarely exceeding ten. They are encouraged to follow their interests and to choose topics in discussion with their tutor. The school's provision meets the requirements of students' statements of special educational need. Those with specific learning difficulties receive individual support with literacy and numeracy and some receive counselling.

The general studies curriculum covers relevant personal, social and health education topics, such as bullying, citizenship and sex and relationships. The school provides physical education through the use of its on-site facilities and by visiting a local swimming pool. Students receive appropriate careers education and guidance which is supported by a visiting Connexions adviser. The school provides a suitable range of courses for students aged 14 to 17 years. These include GCSE or Entry Level courses and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) drama certificate at advanced level.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory overall with some good and outstanding features. Staff adopt a respectful approach towards students which encourages them to develop their own ideas and take responsibility for their decisions. As a result, teachers and students form trusting relationships and there is a very positive atmosphere in lessons. Teachers have good knowledge of the subjects they teach. Teaching in art and drama is particularly effective; high expectations are successful in promoting students' creativity and raising their self-esteem. Resources to support teaching and learning are generally satisfactory, although the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is under-developed. The school recognises this as an area for improvement. Staff have a close knowledge of individual students' personal development. However, the quality of marking is variable and assessment information is not used consistently in all subjects to inform planning. In some lessons, particularly where students have a wide range of capabilities, this leads to work not having the right amount of challenge. The progress of students following accredited courses is measured effectively as they complete the course modules.

Given that several students have failed to thrive in their previous schools, they make good progress during their time at Sands School. The flexible curriculum and caring ethos successfully promote students' self-confidence and improve their attitudes to learning. In the words of one parent 'my son has changed from a bored, unenthusiastic child into a lively, chatty and very sociable one'. This reflects the outstanding progress students make in developing their speaking and listening skills. In addition, several gain five A\* to C grades in subjects at GCSE each year and a large proportion gain advanced passes in the LAMDA drama examination.

### Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding as a result of the school's caring ethos and the very effective democratic approach to running the school. There are valuable opportunities for students to reflect and experience

spiritual awareness through the creative arts. Students display very mature attitudes and their behaviour is outstanding. Although there are minimal rules, the school community's expectations of its students are very high and any unacceptable behaviour is dealt with democratically and effectively. Students have a good understanding of social issues. For example, when discussing bullying, one student suggested that 'bullies are sometimes unhappy themselves, that's why they feel the need to pick on others'.

Students enjoy their education at Sands School very much because of their involvement in the running of the school and their ability to develop specific aptitudes or interests, especially in art and drama. They also feel valued as individuals and are proud of their school. Consequently, they willingly make a positive contribution, for example through the well-planned 'useful work' sessions when they take responsibility for cleaning the premises or when they cook lunchtime meals for the staff and students. These experiences prepare students well for their future lives.

The success of the democratic approach to running the school is summed up in the words of a parent: 'On my first visit to the school I was struck by the friendly relaxed atmosphere, where the students are free to express themselves, knowing that they will be heard.' As a result, students develop a high level of social skills and a very good understanding of right and wrong. The school council is an elected body which discusses issues including discipline very openly and frankly. The school meeting is open to all members of the school community and most attend. It is run extremely professionally and democratically under the chairmanship of an elected individual, usually a student. All participants are courteous and follow the rules of the meeting extremely well. This promotes a high level of verbal skills and provides excellent preparation for students' participation in a democratic society.

Students are considerate of the needs of people from different cultural backgrounds and there are good links with other democratic schools around the world. Many students benefit from the good range of international visits and exchanges including some to Israel, India and Japan.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is inadequate. Although the school has a very caring ethos and there is a high level of mutual respect, too little attention is paid to health and safety requirements. As a result, a large majority of requirements in this area have not been met.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not take sufficient account of recent guidance. There is a child protection policy but staff have not received the required training. Students feel safe and say that, although there is very little bullying, any incidents are dealt with very effectively. The school has a suitable behaviour policy, although the bullying policy is insufficiently detailed. Students have a good

understanding about how to lead healthy lifestyles. The majority of students choose to have the healthy lunches prepared by the students and the school voted overwhelmingly to support a student's proposal to have fruit available throughout the day.

The school does not have formal risk assessments for the premises or for specific activities. As a result a number of potential hazards have gone unchecked. For example, there are trailing electrical leads in some areas and many fluorescent light tubes do not have covers. The school's policy for educational visits and the associated risk assessments are inadequate. Following a fire officer's report in 2003, there is evidence that some, but not all, of the recommendations have been acted upon. Current fire safety requirements are not met because the school does not have an up to date risk assessment. A first aid policy is in place and a suitable number of members of staff are appropriately trained. However, the policy needs to be updated in order to provide sufficiently detailed guidance to staff. The school is aware that its admission register does not fully comply with current regulations and work is underway to rectify this. The school has not prepared an accessibility plan for disabled pupils and, therefore, does not fully comply with its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

### Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for the appointment of staff do not meet the regulations. The school does not consistently follow up references, check the identity or confirm the qualifications for newly appointed staff. There is evidence that some, but not all, staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau. The school is currently reviewing and updating its procedures.

### School's premises and accommodation

The school provides a satisfactory standard of accommodation. It occupies a Georgian house with additional buildings which have been added in recent years. There are specialist rooms for science, art, music, ICT and woodwork. A multi-gym and climbing wall are located in the grounds. Classrooms are generally small but of adequate size for the numbers of students. The age of the building presents a strain on the resources for maintenance and in some areas the decoration is just adequate. The school does not have a room for students who are ill, and there are insufficient toilets for the number of students on roll. There is good space for outdoor recreation with an all-weather pitch, skateboard ramp, tree house, wildlife gardens and a vegetable plot tended by students.

### Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Much information is passed on verbally to parents when they visit the school or when

their child is admitted. However, the school does not provide for parents and carers and others all the required information about the school and is currently updating its prospectus to include this information. Parents and carers receive satisfactory written reports on their children's progress each year, although information on academic progress sometimes lacks detail. Parents hold extremely positive views about the work of the school and appreciate the welcoming and friendly atmosphere. 'It is a remarkable school in so many ways', commented one of the many very satisfied parents.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school has recently updated its complaints policy to ensure it meets all the regulations.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- establish a framework to assess students' work regularly and thoroughly and use the information from such assessment to plan teaching so that all students can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for students' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement a written policy to prevent bullying which has regard to the DfES guidance '*Bullying: don't suffer in silence*' (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- ensure that staff receive training in child protection and update and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of students in compliance with the DfES guidance '*Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education*' (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of students on activities outside the school which has regard to DfES guidance '*Health and safety of pupils on educational visits*' (paragraph 3(2)(c))
- have regard to the DfES guidance '*Health and safety: responsibilities and powers*' (paragraph 3(4))
- ensure there is a satisfactory level of fire safety and up-to-date risk assessment as required under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 (paragraph 3(5))

- update the policy on first aid and ensure it is implemented (paragraph 3(6))
- ensure the admission register complies fully with the Education (Student Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure there has been a check with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b))
- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, ensure appropriate checks have been carried out to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references and take such information into account when determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(c)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure there are sufficient toilets for staff and students in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k))
- provide appropriate facilities for students who are ill in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide the address and telephone number of its registered or principal office of the body of persons who have ownership of the school (paragraph 6(2)(b))
- provide the address for correspondence and telephone number of the chair of the board of governors (paragraph 6(2)(c))
- provide particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- provide particulars of the educational and welfare provision for students with statements of special education need and for students for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request:
  - particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour and sanctions adopted in the event of students misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h))
  - particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i))



- details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)).
- provide for local authorities (and on request to the Secretary of State) an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of each student they fund (paragraph 6(7)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002) the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

## School details

Name of school	Sands School		
DfES number	878/6042		
Unique reference number	113619		
Type of school	Secondary day school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1987		
Age range of pupils	11-17		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll	Boys: 29	Girls: 25	Total: 54
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 4	Girls: 0	Total: 4
Annual fees	£6,150		
Address of school	48 East Street Ashburton Newton Abbot Devon TQ13 7AX		
Telephone number	01364 653666		
Email address	enquiry@sandsschool.demon.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr S Bellamy		
Proprietor	Sands School Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI		
Dates of inspection	2-3 May 2007		