

Sir John Lawes School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117511
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312640
Inspection date	27 February 2008
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1190
6th form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alan Read
Headteacher	Ms Claire Robins
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	Manland Way Harpenden Hertfordshire AL5 4QP
Telephone number	01582 760043
Fax number	01582 469793

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: teaching and learning; care, guidance and support; the students' personal development; and leadership and management. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This school is larger than average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average and the local area displays a number of social and economic advantages. Attainment on entry is above average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and of those who are learning English as an additional language is below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or with a statement of special educational need is average.

Unusually, the school has been awarded specialist status in three distinct areas: media and communication technologies, training school status and most recently science specialist status. In addition, the school has also been awarded the Healthy Schools Award, International School Status and Arts Mark Gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Individual students are challenged, supported and encouraged; they comment that they feel valued and consider themselves fortunate to attend the school. There is a very strong mutual respect and excellent relationship between staff and students; behaviour is excellent and attendance is above average. The care, guidance and support the students receive are outstanding and procedures to safeguard learners meet current government requirements. The use of assessment to inform teaching and academic mentoring is excellent. As a consequence, the students' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding.

Standards and achievement are outstanding. Results at Key Stage 3 have risen remorselessly for the last five years, with outcomes in mathematics worthy of particular praise. The progress the students make from age 11 to GCSE is excellent. The school has secured fourth place in the national league tables for the second year running. In 2007, nine out of ten students achieved five higher grade GCSE and two-thirds were awarded ten higher grade passes. Three quarters of the Year 11 students attained five higher grade GCSE including English and mathematics, a key measure of pupil progress. Individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who find learning more difficult or who have disabilities progress as well as the rest of the year group. At A level, the proportion of students achieving three or more 'A' grades was above the national and local authority average. These post 16 results helped the school secure fifth place amongst Hertfordshire state schools.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding, as demonstrated, at least in part, by the consistent improvement in the school's standards in the last five years. The helpful comments and guidance provided by the best marking is very good but could be developed more consistently across the school. The strengths of teaching are founded in the school's specialist status. The impact of the work developed in media and communications was refined and shared across the school with the award of training school status. In the last year, the school has been awarded specialist status in science and designation as an International School; there are few schools nationally that have received four such accolades from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

As a result of the ideas developed within areas of the school's specialist expertise, curriculum provision is excellent in the main school. Extra-curricular opportunities are extensive and the reputation of the school's musical expertise significant. Senior staff feel that further enhancements are possible to the good range of academic options available in the sixth form and HMI agree.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is robust. Members of the senior and middle management teams were invited to accompany HMI in the joint observation of teaching. The detailed analysis of learning developed with inspectors highlighted areas where the school's appraisal of the quality of learning can be further refined.

Healthy lifestyles are the norm; the level of sporting participation and of competitive success is particularly high. Provision for students who need support with their learning or have disabilities is outstanding because of the individualised programme of opportunities and support provided. The school prepares students for the next steps in their education extremely well.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Leaders and managers at every level provide clear direction, encouraging staff towards the innovation that has consistently led to

improvements in standards, provision and care. Governance is outstanding and the governing body has played a major role in securing and supporting specialist status. Self-evaluation is excellent and is a significant part of the school's outstanding capacity to improve. HMI could find no significant weaknesses in the school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form provision is outstanding overall with particular strengths in academic mentoring and assessment for learning. When interviewed, older students were full of praise for the care, support and guidance offered. Post 16 curricular provision has been developed with two other local schools; however, in the light of current government priorities for the age group, further enhancements to provision are possible.

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine the procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to turn effective teaching into outstanding learning opportunities.
- Secure consistency of style, form and quality of marking to match the best practice.
- Utilise the opportunities provided by the school's specialist accreditations and current government initiatives to enhance post 16 provision.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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

28 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir John Lawes School, Harpenden, AL5 4QP

I wish to thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of the school. You greeted the inspectors with courtesy and consideration wherever we went. The attitudes to learning you displayed were very positive. The respect you offered to your classmates and the staff was very good to see. We had the opportunity to interview students from all year groups, you were all very positive about the school and many of you echoed the phrase used by one young man, 'It is a privilege to attend Sir John Lawes.'

Inspectors judged the quality of educational provision and the care, guidance and support you receive to be outstanding. The many strengths of this provision are founded in the school's three specialist accreditations; there are few schools on the national stage who have received three such accolades from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

As the school is constantly seeking to improve, I have asked the headteacher and the governing body to focus on developing further outstanding learning opportunities, ensuring the guidance you receive from teachers marking is always as good as the best practice in the school and finally to extend the range of sixth form opportunities available.

Many of your parents took the time to write to me about the school, please give them my thanks. I have tried to answer their questions in the report and I would encourage you to read the whole document at www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports/ and then use the schools post code to go straight to the report.

It was a pleasure to meet you and I look forward to hearing about your future success.

David Jones - Her Majesty's Inspector