

# St George's VA School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117556
<b>Local Authority</b>	HERTFORDSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	312652
<b>Inspection date</b>	10 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Jones HMI

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1208
6th form	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Kevin Parsons
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Norman Hoare
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 January 2004
<b>School address</b>	Sun Lane Harpenden Hertfordshire AL5 4TD
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582765477
<b>Fax number</b>	01582469830

---

<b>Age group</b>	11-18
<b>Inspection date</b>	10 October 2007
<b>Inspection number</b>	312652

---

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## Introduction

This 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: the distinguishing features of the school's ethos that have helped to reproduce such positive outcomes in public examinations; the school's specialist status in helping to take the school forward; the school's preparation for the development of the curriculum for pupils aged 14-19; and the students' views of the care, welfare and guidance they receive. Evidence was gathered from the school's data, pupils' work, lesson observations, meetings with school staff and students and with the senior leadership team and governors.

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 its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report

## Description of the school

St George's is larger than average, with a thriving sixth form and boarding provision. The local area enjoys a range of social and economic advantages. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is very low. The proportion of girls and boys varies annually. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average, although the numbers that do not have English as their first language is below average. Attainment on entry is above average and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average; however, the number with a statement of special educational needs is very low.

The school has a Christian Foundation and is regarded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as a Faith School. The school is non-denominational and does not receive funding from any religious group or church.

## 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, where the search for educational success is underpinned by the school's Christian ethos and facilitated by a house system that is at the centre of every aspect of the school's life. The students comment that the house system provides challenge, support, care and opportunity for all within the context of an extended family'. HMI could find no significant weaknesses in the school.

Students benefit from the alchemy of the intangible but prevailing historical legacy of this school, where high achievement is the expectation, reflected in the motto 'Aim Higher' that is carved into the portico of the school entrance. Individuals are valued; there is very strong mutual respect and excellent relationships between staff and students. The consequence is that students develop a very mature sense of responsibility for themselves, show significant consideration for others and make an extremely full and active contribution to the school and wider community.

Standards and achievement are outstanding. Results at all levels have continued to rise steadily since 2003, when they were already above the national average. The unvalidated 2007 Key Stage 3 results for English, mathematics and science were very high. Similarly, the proportion of students who achieved the higher Level 6 or better in these core subjects is likely to be in the top 10% of schools nationally. Students make very good progress against challenging targets at age 14 and 16. Individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress as well as the rest of the year group.

The 2007 Key Stage 4 GCSE results exceeded the targets set by the governors and were very high. Nine out of ten students achieved five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE that included English and mathematics. Three quarters of the year group, obtained eight or more such passes and half of the students obtained five A\*/A grades at GCSE.

Students' personal development is outstanding as are their behaviour and attitudes to learning. Their contribution to the school community is excellent; an example was seen in the manner three sixth-form students in the Chapel, rehearsed a house senior choir, for an inter-house competition; the quality of the performance evoked a moment of awe and wonder for those privileged to be present. The pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Attendance is above average and the students are full of praise for every aspect of the school. Healthy lifestyles are the norm and the level of sporting participation is particularly high because of the range of house competition. The high level of their key skills ensures they are splendidly prepared for life after school.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding; this is evidenced, at least in part, by the consistent improvement in the school's already high standards over the last four years. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching are robust; members of the senior management team were invited to accompany HMI in joint observations of teaching, and the school's analysis of learning was validated by inspectors.

The specialist technology status of the school has made a powerful contribution to the school's ethos. The tangible investment in staffing and resources resulting from this award has enhanced the school's capacity and confidence to raise standards, meet the curriculum demands of the new century and support, through its outreach work, local schools. The response to the accountability that accompanies specialist status has meant significant investment in the leadership skills of middle management across the school, refined the school's ability to evaluate

itself and helped establish the consistency of high quality teaching. As a result the number of students taking mathematics and science at advanced level has significantly increased. That said, the school presents many complementary facets; specialist status has not downgraded the importance of literature, the arts, humanities, languages, physical education within the school. The breadth of the school's curriculum and its exceptional enrichment programme stems precisely from this fact. The school is sensitive and responsive in meeting the needs of students and where appropriate, tailoring the curriculum to meet them. Provision for students with additional learning needs is outstanding. The school prepares students for the next steps in their education extremely well.

The school's pastoral care system is a key element in the house system. Mixed age tutor groups provide a context students appreciate for the social and supportive dynamic it provides. Academic mentoring is based on the rigorous use of assessment information to set targets and provide individual support. Students note that on the limited occasions minor bullying had taken place, staff or older students in their house dealt with it quickly and effectively. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements; care, guidance and support are outstanding.

Leadership and management are outstanding, as is governance, which holds the school to account and to the principles established by the founder, the Reverend Cecil Grant who opened the school a hundred years ago. Leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction that has consistently led to improvements in standards, provision and care. Self-evaluation is outstanding and forms the basis of carefully trialed educational initiatives. The school's capacity to improve further is excellent and it gives outstanding value for money.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 1**

The sixth form is outstanding. This is not just for the wide range of opportunities provided, nor simply for the support, care and guidance it offers to younger students, or even because of the high standards achieved in A-level examinations, but because of the exceptional contribution it makes to the life of the school.

## **Effectiveness of boarding provision**

### **Grade: 1**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 1**

When the headteacher took the decision to allocate boarders in each of the school's four houses, this provided the context for its current success. A wide range of students in the main school acknowledged the contribution boarders make to the house system. Academically, boarders were the highest performing group of students at A level in 2007. Older students are very aware of their responsibilities towards younger students and the potent part they play as role models within the school.

A separate report on matters related to the residential aspects of the school's provision will be published by a Children's Services Inspector and can be found against the school's name on the Ofsted web site.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

The school's self-evaluation highlights a number of important and well-argued areas for future development; inspectors considered that two of these should be at the core of the further enhancement of provision.

- Review the national developments in the 14-19 curriculum to expand the range of opportunities post-16 even further.
- Ensure students work as productively as possible by further refining the use of assessment.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**

## 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
---	----------------	-------

### 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	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	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	
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	

### 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	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

<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>	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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	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	
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**

11 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St George's VA School, Sun Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 4TD

I wish to thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of the school. As you will have heard from the Headmaster, the school was judged to be outstanding in all major respects. Every student we spoke to commented on the strong sense of 'family' within their respective houses. Younger students valued the personal support they receive from their sixth form mentors and Year 10 commented on the opportunities provided by the house system for individuals to lead and support a wide range of activities.

The school development plan includes a number of issues to be addressed in the future in order to maintain the quality of provision you currently enjoy. However, inspectors picked out two key areas to enhance the development of the school. The range of opportunities for 14-19 year olds will change in the next three years and the school has begun to consider this matter. Secondly, the school believes that it can further refine the use of assessment to enhance learning and inspectors agree.

In the main body of the report you will see how positively we viewed the school and how impressed we were with your contributions to its daily life.

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

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector