

Lawrence Sheriff School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125753
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	315304
Inspection date	9 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	869
6th form	329
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Thomas
Headteacher	Peter Kent
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2005
School address	Clifton Road Rugby CV21 3AG
Telephone number	01788 542074
Fax number	01788 567962

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the impact of the school's provision in contributing to the school's exceptionally high standards; the contribution that students make to the school's overall effectiveness; the effectiveness of systems to monitor and assess students' progress. Evidence was collected from visits to lessons, scrutiny of students' work and teachers' planning, discussions with students, staff and governors, the views of parents and a scrutiny of the school's documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than the average secondary school but has a large sixth form. As a selective school, students' attainment on entry in Year 7 is well above average. Few students are eligible for free school meals, although the non-selective nature of the sixth form means that about a quarter of students are eligible for educational maintenance allowances. Most students are White British. Of the small number of students from minority ethnic groups, all speak English fluently. A much lower proportion of students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has collaborative arrangements with other schools for some sixth form subjects. The school became a specialist college for mathematics and computing in 2003 and has Investor in People status, including the Leadership and Management award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Lawrence Sheriff is an outstandingly successful school that provides students with an excellent standard of education. As a result, they develop academically and personally into well-rounded young men who are prepared extremely well for their future lives. The school's strength lies in its culture of very high achievement, innovation and great sense of community. These three elements, together with the extremely positive relationships between staff and students and students themselves, combine to produce a vibrant and dynamic environment in which students thrive. The vast majority of parents are very supportive of the school and consider that their sons are well cared for and make good progress.

Standards are exceptionally high throughout, as shown by the results in the national tests in Year 9, and in GCSE and A-level examinations. The Year 9 test results have been consistently very high for at least the past five years. In 2007, they were particularly high in mathematics, which is one of the school's specialist subjects. The results in English also improved, especially at the higher Level 7. In the GCSE examinations, the results have improved year on year, with a considerable rise in the overall average points score and for the students' best eight subjects. In 2007, all students gained at least five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics, with 66% gaining the highest grades of A* and A. The results in mathematics were impressive, with four out of five students gaining the highest two grades. In the sixth form, the most recent A-level results show that all students attained grades A to E, with more than a half obtaining the highest grades of A and B.

Students make excellent progress in all years to reach these very high standards because of the high quality teaching, the challenging targets they are set, the school's robust systems for tracking their progress and the variety of pathways provided by the curriculum. The vast majority, including the small number with specific learning and other difficulties, exceed their challenging targets as the school adds considerable value to students' learning. As a result, students' achievement is outstanding. The school exceeded its specialist school targets in 2007.

The defining feature of most of the teaching is that of high expectations of what students are capable of achieving. Teachers use their high levels of subject knowledge to provide students with interesting and demanding tasks, which stretch them, develop their higher-order learning skills, and prepare them successfully for tests and public examinations. In a highly successful English lesson in Year 13, the teacher made excellent use of the A-level course assessment criteria to focus the students' analysis of a piece of writing undertaken by a previous Year 13 student, thus helping them to gain a greater understanding of the criteria in a relevant context.

Lessons are characterised by sharply focused questions to make students think more deeply and widely, together with clear explanations and guidance on how to tackle the work systematically, as seen, for example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 7. In addition, teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) extensively to support their teaching and to provide a range of different stimuli to extend learning.

Students respond enthusiastically to these different approaches and work hard in lessons. They use computers very well to support learning, particularly to research topics, as was seen, for example, in a challenging Year 9 geography lesson on energy. Relationships are very positive and supportive, which adds greatly to making learning an enjoyable experience. In addition, teachers assess students' work and their progress regularly and thoroughly against their ambitious targets, so that students know where they are at and what they need to do to improve.

The result is that students soak up the opportunities and challenges they receive, becoming confident, independent and highly motivated learners.

Students thrive in the positive atmosphere engendered within the school and by the excellent care, guidance and support they receive, so their personal development is of a consistently high order. They thoroughly enjoy being at school, have high levels of attendance and willingly participate in all that the school offers. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Their very high standards of behaviour and the quality of relationships show that students have a highly developed understanding of their own and others' safety. They feel very secure in the school and have great confidence that staff will respond quickly if a need arises. A small number of parents, though, express a concern about misbehaviour at break and lunchtimes and in a few lessons, but nothing untoward was seen during the inspection.

Students are extremely well prepared to meet the challenges that they will encounter as they grow older. They act responsibly and have an excellent understanding of the need for a healthy lifestyle. They make a considerable contribution to the school and the wider community, particularly through the initiatives brought about through the school's specialisms. They have a strong voice in the school's development through the student councils, and also participate actively in reviewing the school's work, undertaking activities such as lesson observations, contributing to departmental reviews and involvement in staff interviews. Such activities have attracted national interest as a model of good practice.

The school has a successful record of innovation to improve the quality of its provision and help students get the most out of their schooling. These include developments to the curriculum, the introduction of a vertical tutor group system and several initiatives to improve teaching and learning and the quality of leadership and management. The school is at the leading edge of many developments and much of its work is recognised nationally.

While maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum, changes to the organisation of the curriculum and the school day provide students with a wide range of pathways to meet their individual needs and aspirations. Other changes include an extensive programme of enrichment opportunities as part of the weekly curriculum to broaden students' experiences. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, which are well attended by students, complement these opportunities.

As part of its strategy to personalise learning more effectively, the school has reorganised its year group arrangement to that of a vertical tutor group system. Despite initial anxieties by students, staff and parents, the benefits of such an arrangement are being realised. For example, older students mentor and support younger students very effectively, especially in the setting of personal targets and providing a sympathetic ear when they have any problems, so that all gain a clear sense of being part of a family. It also provides tutors with increased opportunities to support individual students and to check their progress more closely.

The headteacher's outstanding leadership, together with the very strong support of his deputy and the senior leadership team, underpins much of the school's success. There is a relentless focus on raising standards, improving teaching and learning, and sharpening the quality of leadership and management. Involvement in an external project to iron out differences in subject results to less than 10% of each other has been successful and is now focused on self-evaluation and paired departmental reviews. This has done much to share best practice and foster a culture of joint learning. The newly introduced 'teaching triads' approach of grouping teachers to work together, on a confidential basis, to improve their practice, including risk taking, has considerable potential to raise the quality of teaching further.

Senior managers have an acute understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development, some of which are focused on embedding the major changes that were introduced as part of the 'big bang' approach in September 2006. The evidence shows that the school has been very successful in all that it has done, including implementing the issues identified during its last inspection, and has excellent capacity to improve. As a result, there are no specific issues identified for the school to improve further. The governing body plays a full part in supporting the school, contributing very effectively to determining its strategic direction and evaluating the quality of its provision.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Standards are exceptionally high in the sixth form and are all the more remarkable because of the non-selective nature of the sixth form and the influx of about half the Year 12 cohort from other schools. This means that students' attainment on entry to some courses is wider than the school's GCSE results would indicate. Most of these students settle in extremely well to the school, a testimony to the very high quality care, guidance and support and the friendly welcome they receive. Students say they are thoroughly enjoying their courses, although a few have found the academic demands made of them very challenging. Across Years 12 and 13, students make very good progress and achieve exceptionally well, as shown in the AS- and A-level results. Undue variations in standards between subjects in previous years have been ironed out successfully.

Students do so well because of the highly demanding teaching and the careful tracking of their progress. Sixth form leaders and tutors monitor students' progress regularly against their targets and take firm action where there is any danger of underperformance. The quality of teaching reflects that in the main school, ensuring high levels of challenge to keep students well focused and on track. Students are keen and interested, and show high levels of skills and ability to work independently. They also make a strong contribution to the college community and set an excellent example to others, particularly in their roles as mentors to younger students.

The curriculum meets students' needs and aspirations extremely well. Students are able to choose from a wide range of AS- and A-level courses, some in collaboration with other schools to provide greater flexibility of choice, and a BTEC course in sport, which bridges a gap in local provision. Retention rates are particularly high and nearly all students go on to higher education when they leave school. The sixth form is led and managed very well.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no specific issues identified for the school to address.

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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	1
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	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	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

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	
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

10 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Lawrence Sheriff School, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 3AG

Thank you for your welcome when I visited your school in early November. I would particularly like to thank those students who met with me and gave me their views about the school. I appreciated your openness and cooperation. This letter is to tell you of my findings. Many of you may like to read the full report, which will be sent to your parents or carers.

You go to an outstandingly successful school that enables you to attain exceptionally high standards and make excellent progress through the high quality of the teaching and the careful monitoring of your progress towards meeting very challenging targets. Your attitudes to school and to learning are exemplary and you work hard. The curriculum, with its wide range of courses and enrichment opportunities, meets your needs and aspirations very effectively and, together with the excellent care, guidance and support you receive, enables you to get the most out of what the school offers you. As a result, you are becoming confident, articulate and well-qualified young men, well prepared for your future lives and careers.

Relationships between you are strong and you say that you feel safe and valued. The current tutor system allows you to make an excellent contribution to supporting one another. Other opportunities enable you to contribute very effectively to the wider community.

The headteacher, with the strong support of his senior colleagues, leads and manages the school extremely well. They are making sure that there is an appropriate balance between challenging you to do your best and making sure that you are well cared for and supported. You should be proud of the contribution you are making to the school's success.

I consider that the school is doing all it can to be successful and I have not identified any specific area where I think the school needs to focus on to improve further. I hope that you will all continue to strive for excellence in all that you do, both now and in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Joan Greenfield Lead inspector

Annex B

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Yours sincerely

Mrs Joan Greenfield
Lead inspector