

Tanbridge House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126064
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	315417
Inspection dates	21–22 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Christine Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1272
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bill Wilkinson
Headteacher	Maureen Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Farthings Hill Guildford Road Horsham RH12 1SR
Telephone number	01403 263628
Fax number	01403 211830

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Tanbridge House School is larger than other similar schools and is the only co-educational school in Horsham. It was designated as a specialist school for science, mathematics and computing in September 2006. Few students come from minority ethnic groups or have English as an additional language. Fewer students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students come from a range of backgrounds and more boys than girls attend the school. The school has gained silver and bronze Eco awards and a silver Artsmark award, and was the only West Sussex school to gain an award for work experience in July 2005. The school was awarded 'Investors in People' status in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Tanbridge House is a good school that works hard with the students to improve the progress they make. As a result, achievement is good and standards are rising. Students enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are just above those expected nationally and when they leave in Year 11 standards are above national averages in most subjects and high in some.

Students are well cared for by the school and their personal development is good. They appreciate the opportunities available to them and show increasingly positive attitudes to learning. Attendance is above average and most students behave well in lessons and around the school. They are maturing as responsible citizens with a commitment to improving the school community. Students say, 'There's a great sense of community here. People are not afraid to speak in assembly. There's a good atmosphere.' They are especially proud of the 'student voice' initiative and the way this involves them in school life. The school has good links with a wide range of partners and outside agencies and these give secure support to many students, particularly those who are more vulnerable.

The curriculum is good. The range of courses has been extended to provide greater flexibility and choice and this is helping to motivate students and provide pathways to further education, training and employment. Through the school's specialist status, there is increased provision to meet students' needs in vocational courses and improved information and communication technology (ICT) resources, and resulting initiatives such as the greater use of ICT by teachers and students and better assessment have improved the quality of teaching and promoted good learning. Much of the work produced by students is thoroughly marked but this is not consistent across the school. Students are quite clear about the targets they have been given although they do not always know exactly what they have to do to reach them. The good quality of leadership throughout the school is driving the development of teaching and learning and the consequent rise in achievement. Self-evaluation is robust and gives an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors know the school well and have a good strategic role in development although they are not sufficiently challenging in holding it to account for its performance.

The headteacher has built strong leadership capacity at all levels and effective teamwork that has created good capacity for continuing improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the marking of students' work so that it is consistent, regular and tells students how they can improve.
- Give clearer feedback to students on what they need to do to reach their performance targets.
- Ensure that governors are more involved in challenging the school to improve its performance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In 2006, overall standards in Key Stage 3 and those in mathematics and science were above average. Standards in English were in line with national averages. Standards improved in 2007, particularly in English. The school met the challenging targets it set for Key Stage 3 in both 2006 and 2007. In 2006, GCSE results improved from 2005 and were above the national average. Preliminary information for 2007 indicates that this trend is continuing and the percentage of

students who gained five A* to C GCSE grades increased again. Boys and girls reached similar standards. When English and mathematics are included, standards are also above those found nationally. Almost all students gained at least one GCSE pass and more gained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to G than nationally.

Results in some GCSE subjects were very high in 2007. Significant numbers of students gained grades A/A* in English literature, religious education (RE), physical education (PE) and additional mathematics. Students made particularly good progress in RE, dance and modern foreign languages, especially French and German. The targets set for standards at GCSE were easily surpassed in 2006 and 2007 although current and future targets are more challenging.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress at both Key Stages 3 and 4. They thrive in the inclusive atmosphere of the school. Some students with significant physical disabilities make particularly good progress because the school has a very good understanding of their needs and gives them very effective support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students say that variety in lessons and positive encouragement by the staff make the school a good place in which to learn. Students come to school regularly and most behave well although a few can lack purposeful attitudes in lessons and this can spoil both their own enjoyment of learning and that of others.

Students feel safe in school. They know there are many people they can talk to and say, 'Teachers always make time for us.' They have a great deal of respect for their police community support officer (PCSO) and appreciate the work he does in and around the school. Students say that bullying is not a significant issue and that any incidents are dealt with well. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The strong citizenship programme gives students good opportunities to explore values and beliefs. Students who are peer educators welcome the opportunity for the 'active citizen' responsibility and are keen to support younger students.

Students are well aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They know the canteen serves healthy foods and say, 'We only have fried food once a week and that always is accompanied with vegetables. There is a brilliant range of pastas.' Students make good contributions to the community through activities such as orchestra performances and drama and are keen fund raisers for major charities.

Students receive good advice and take on a range of different responsibilities such as serving on committees, acting as mentors and as members of the flourishing school council. Students are particularly proud of the 'student voice' initiative and say: 'It has changed the ethos of the school... People have merged together rather than sticking in groups.' They particularly enjoyed being at interviews of new teachers: 'It was a great experience and a great opportunity to learn new skills that we need for the work place.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers enjoy mostly good working relationships with their students and manage their learning effectively. Teachers know their subjects very well and, for the most part, enjoy positive and

supportive relationships with their students. Most teaching is challenging and lively although some of the school ICT resources such as interactive whiteboards are used unimaginatively. Objectives are clear and meet a wide range of learning needs, and as a result students settle willingly to the tasks set, although teachers sometimes take too long explaining them. Students respond particularly well where they are given opportunities for independent learning and encouraged to use their initiative creatively. There is some variation in the way teachers use marking to show students how to improve their work, but they are making a determined effort to extend the use and range of assessment strategies that promote achievement. Good systems for regular tracking of students' progress provide information from which students are set challenging individual learning targets. These are often ambitious and encourage them to aim higher and are helping to raise achievement. Students like being given opportunities to assess their own work and that of others and they respond maturely with constructive criticism.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported effectively by teachers and learning support assistants who have a very good understanding of their needs and how to meet them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been the subject of intensive review and is now increasingly relevant to the needs and interests of the students. At Key Stage 3 a broader range of subjects are on offer. Students can study two modern foreign languages and all take drama and ICT. Citizenship is included within the good personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme as well as integrated into other subjects.

At Key Stage 4 the range of options is improving to allow students a choice of different combinations of both academic and vocational courses that help to meet their abilities and aspirations. Alternative courses are offered including work-related skills, college attendance or additional support with literacy. The curriculum is extended through good activities including 'enrichment week' activities for all years, involvement of visitors from industry and the community, and trips away from school as well as master classes in mathematics and science for more able students.

Many students participate in the good range of extra-curricular clubs, most notably in PE, music and drama, with regular performances within and outside school. After-hours subject support is very popular, especially in helping with revision or enabling students to reach higher grades.

The school's specialist status in mathematics, science and computing has had a good impact on the curriculum especially through links with primary schools and the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care, guidance and support contribute significantly to the strength of students' personal development. They have ready access to personal help and advice through good provision from teachers, teaching assistants, and from fellow students specifically trained to be peer mentors. A significant minority of parents expressed concerns regarding bullying and students' behaviour. Inspectors looked at this in some detail and found it to be no more significant than the national picture. The school has a clear policy on bullying that is understood by the students and they feel that good systems are in place to deal with the occasional problem.

Students like and appreciate the weekly mentoring sessions with their tutor. They feel these meetings strengthen the relationship with their tutors. Any students likely to underachieve are quickly identified and offered extra help. Vulnerable children are very well supported through the school's extensive network of outside agencies. The tracking and assessment system checks that students are making progress towards reaching their academic and personal potential. Students are not given consistent guidance from all subject areas about how to improve their work in order to meet their targets. When students first come to Tanbridge House, every effort is made to ensure they quickly settle into the school and parents appreciate this. As one said, 'I am very happy with how my daughter is settling into her new school life.'

There are good arrangements for safeguarding students in lessons and around the school. The comprehensive PSHE programme teaches students how to take responsibility for their own safety and that of others. Statutory requirements for child protection and health and safety are fully met and procedures are secure. Students receive good support in making decisions about academic and vocational options at the ages of 14 and 16. Work-related learning (WRL) is a strong feature of the school through close relationships with local post-16 providers as well as a large number of businesses who support WRL by providing work-experience placements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong leadership and is supported by an effective senior leadership team. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the performance of the school at every level and are able to make perceptive judgements about what the school must do to continue improving. This has built a strong sense of common purpose among staff with good, collaborative working relationships. The effective work of the specialist school planning group also contributes to the teamwork of the school. Middle managers work well together and most have good potential to bring about improvement although there are some inconsistencies. They are well supported by the school's management systems that help them to share good practice in their work. There are high expectations of all staff that are supported by an appropriately tailored programme of coaching and training.

The school's focus on improving learning is proving successful in raising achievement of all students. Senior leaders set high targets for subject departments and their response has produced a significant rise in results in most areas in the past two years. The systematic approach to monitoring classroom practice and reviewing the performance of individuals and groups of students is accelerating progress and raising standards. The school has improved considerably since the last inspection and is well placed to keep moving forward.

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.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	1

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

23 November 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of Tanbridge House School, Horsham, RH12 1SR

After our visit to your school, we would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your very friendly welcome and for taking time to talk to us. You tell us that yours is a good school and we agree with you. We are very pleased that you enjoy your work, attend very regularly, and make the most of the opportunities available to you. You are very appreciative of the wide range of clubs and you are keen on sport, music, drama and dance as well.

The school looks after you very well. You are sure that you feel safe and that there is always someone to turn to when you need help. You appreciate your teachers' readiness to assist you. Many of you make a difference to other students through the 'student voice' and peer educators systems. Because of the hard work of your good headteacher and of your many committed teachers, you are achieving well and reaching above average standards in your examinations and tests.

We have asked your teachers to make sure that your books are thoroughly marked and that each one of you gets regular and worthwhile feedback on how to improve your work. You can help here by using that information to raise the standard of your work and trying hard to meet your targets – hopefully 'platinum' ones! We have also asked your governors to work more closely with the school to continue to raise your achievement.

We wish you and your school a very successful future.

Christine Jones Her Majesty's Inspector



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Her Majesty's Inspector