

Sandhurst School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110068
Local Authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	325094
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk 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 (total)	1116
Sixth form	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jan Edwards
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Fletcher
Date of previous school inspection	2 November 2005
School address	Owlsmoor Road Owlsmoor Sandhurst GU47 0SD
Telephone number	01344 775678
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Age group	11–18
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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

Sandhurst School is a large mixed comprehensive 11–18 community school that has had Science specialist status since February 2003. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Similar proportions of students to those found nationally are from minority groups or are learning English as an additional language. The largest groups are from Nepal. The proportion of students who have been identified as having special educational needs is around average. A sizeable minority of students come to the school during their secondary education. The school has Investors in People award and the Healthy School Gold award. More than half of the senior leadership team and departmental managers have been appointed to their posts recently.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This satisfactory school is improving after a period when its performance was not as good as when last inspected. The most important factor in this recovery is the way that the leadership team is successfully targeting areas requiring improvement with some success. In particular they have focused on improving students' standards and achievement, which are satisfactory overall. In 2008, this resulted in a small improvement in test and examination results that is set to continue this year. This improvement is due to a specific focus on Year 11 students, and on improving the teaching of English across the school. The school has now set targets for all students, and is tracking their progress with renewed rigour to sustain improved results. Students know their target grades and know how to achieve these. The headteacher, very well supported by the senior leaders, has established a clear sense of direction with raised expectations of students and staff. The school knows it has to improve teaching and learning, which is satisfactory. There are some good and outstanding lessons which encourage high-quality independent learning through skilled questioning and practical activities. Senior leaders, through the heads of departments, are promoting the use of a wider range of strategies to encourage students to become independent learners. However, this has not yet had sufficient impact, and too much teaching fails to challenge sufficiently learners of all abilities. Changes to the curriculum are supporting those who find learning more difficult. The satisfactory curriculum is broad, and there has been a small increase in vocational offer, but it does not provide enough choice for learners who may well meet with more successes following alternative pathways.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students' behaviour is exemplary in lessons, and is good overall. The concerns raised by a small group of parents were unfounded. The rewards and sanctions systems are well understood, and there is good support for those at risk of exclusion. The numbers excluded are falling. Students enjoy school, and appreciate the way they are involved in helping to maintain the school's ethos through, for example, the student council and their considerable efforts to support global communities. The school has worked hard to improve attendance and has had some success, but, despite its efforts, attendance remains average. The majority of parents agree that the school provides good care, guidance and support for students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, particularly those who are statemented or receiving support at School Action Plus, are well supported. However, Year 9 learners are currently not given sufficient - nor sufficiently clear - advice on the implications of their choice of options. Parents are quite right to identify the good settling in arrangements for those moving midway through the year. The strong links forged with primary schools through the science specialism contribute to very effective transition arrangements for Year 7 students.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. There is a good training programme underway for middle managers. This is yet to have an impact on the quality of departmental evaluation of performance, which lacks measurable outcomes. Improved links are being established with the governing body, enabling governors to fulfil their roles satisfactorily. Although there has been improvement since the previous inspection, this has not been as rapid as it could have been. Capacity for further improvement is satisfactory.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards and achievement are improving, and are average. The average points score is in line with expectations, and there is a further rise expected. There is still variation in students' achievements between courses, with media and modern language results higher than those in science. The proportion of students unclassified at AS level in some subjects, including science, is high, indicating that some students choose unwisely. In some subject areas, students would appreciate further information on their attainment and what they need to do in order to obtain higher grades. The school has identified the need to improve academic guidance in the sixth form, where the recent introduction of individual mentoring and drop-in sessions has proved helpful in improving performance. While retention rates are good overall, there is very limited vocational provision. The leadership is aware of these inconsistencies and the need to develop provision further. Plans to introduce a more flexible package in September 2009 are well advanced. Students' attitudes are positive and they enjoy school. The house system provides strong links with the main school, but students share the inspectors' view that they would benefit from more links with the local community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by developing more strategies in the classroom for meeting students' different starting points.
- Develop a more diversified curriculum in the main school and sixth form to match more closely the varying needs and aptitudes of the students.
- Increase the rigour with which subject leaders evaluate the action taken to improve achievements and standards.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' performance at GCSE over the last three years has remained average. The percentage of students gaining five or more A*-C grades including English and mathematics is average, but given their starting points this represents unsatisfactory achievement for some students. Performances by students vary between subjects, and a significant minority of students of average ability do not meet their expected targets. The expectation of studying for 10 GCSEs places too much demand on these students, whose writing abilities in particular are not sufficiently advanced to gain the higher levels. Achievements within the group of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also vary, with those with statements and on School Action Plus reaching challenging targets. This reflects the good quality of support that these students receive. However, determined intervention for those students identified as falling behind are proving effective in tackling these issues, and current Year 11 students are on track to achieve considerably better this year. The upward trend is most marked for boys and for those School Action Plus students. Targets in specialist subjects at Key Stage 4 were not met in 2008. However, there is a rising profile of achievement in science, and the school is on track to improve significantly in Key Stage 4 this year.

Standards at end of Key Stage 3 were above average over the last three years, although there was some underachievement among Year 9 students in 2008, particularly in mathematics and English. But improvements are evident at this level too, and students are on course to achieve some challenging targets, particularly the more able. The improvement in mathematics is more impressive than English, as a consequence of greater emphasis on using and applying calculation skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. The excellent mapping of the spiritual dimension in the curriculum promotes this, and is a strength of the school. Students generally make healthy choices, as indicated by more students eating a healthy school meal and high numbers choosing to participate in physical extra-curricular activities. Students feel safe at school; bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively by the school. Behaviour is good, and incidents of disruption or poor behaviour are very rare. The school is calm; students are respectful of one other and of visitors. Diverse groups of students, including those of different genders and ethnicities, have excellent relationships. This is a strength of the school. Students say that they enjoy school, and this is apparent, especially in lessons where they can apply their learning to challenging tasks, either independently or as part of a group. Their attendance has improved recently and is in line with that of similar schools. An active citizenship programme involves most students, and has been successful in serving the needs of many community groups including a substantial group of Nepali parents. This aspect is good, and extends to the international dimension, for example in the Reaching Rwanda project. Students develop satisfactory workplace and other skills that contribute to their future economic well-being, through satisfactory skills in literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT).

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers have satisfactory and increasing expectations of the standards that students can achieve, and most plan appropriate learning outcomes for their students. There are examples of good and outstanding practice across all subjects; however, not all teachers ensure that students learn at a sufficiently rapid rate or aspire to sufficiently high standards. Senior leaders are supporting teachers in introducing more effective and efficient methods to ensure better learning, but this is not widespread within all departments. Senior leaders are also leading strategies to ensure a greater focus on matching work to help students reach their targets; however, this improvement has not yet had sufficient impact across the school to ensure that all students make good progress. Teachers have good relationships with students, and are successful in creating a motivating classroom atmosphere in which learning is enjoyable. Teaching assistants are well deployed in lessons to support those with additional learning needs, who often make good progress in lessons. Some teachers make good and imaginative use of ICT to raise motivation and support students' learning. In the very best lessons, teachers regularly assessed students' understanding through different levels of questioning, and allowed time for extended class discussion. However, these strengths are not seen throughout the school, and some lessons, although satisfactory, lack this level of challenge, skilled questioning and engagement by students. In lessons in which progress is satisfactory rather than good, too

much time is spent on whole-class teaching at the expense of thinking and reasoning. The frequency and quality of marking are also variable across departments. Students are not always taken to task about the poor presentation of their work, or given constructive advice on how to improve. This weaker methodology tends to inhibit students' progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

At Key Stage 3, all students follow a similar programme of National Curriculum subjects, and the focus on rigorous assessment has made a difference to this provision. At Key Stage 4, most students take a full programme of GCSEs, more than in most schools, and this means there is less time for compulsory religious education, physical education and ICT. It also places demands on some lower- and average-attaining students, who do not achieve their best as a result. However, a small group of less-able students is well served by the Skills Challenge programme. Some vocational courses are offered in response to students' needs and preferences, and there is some limited work in partnership with other post-16 providers to extend the curriculum with other qualifications. Students have limited opportunities to develop the independent learning skills which a more diverse curriculum might offer them. The programme of personal, social, health, careers and citizenship education is a strength. Students respond well to this, and the programme contributes to their good personal development and well-being. The curriculum is enriched by activities such as the Science Explosion, in which younger students are joined by those from primary schools for an exciting two-day event developing scientific ideas and their relevance to the world. There is a full and varied cross-curricular programme, and high numbers of students enjoy participating in this. The science team is developing the use of the virtual learning environment, and this now needs to be spread to other subjects in the school. Some new science GCSE and A-level courses have been provided, but other sorts of qualifications in science which could meet the needs of more students are not available. Participation in three science GCSEs and in AS levels in science subjects has increased, but several sixth-form students do not continue with science to Year 13.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Compliance with all legal requirements for safeguarding is good, both at whole-school level and in the sixth form. Risk assessments to support off-site visits are of good quality. Bullying incidents are rare and are dealt with effectively. Parents recognise and appreciate how well the school includes all students, and praise the arrangements for a smooth entry to the school in Year 7, and those for students joining at a later date. The school prides itself in promoting equality effectively and celebrating diversity, and racial harmony is good. Students from the settled Traveller community are fully integrated into the school, and the strategies to integrate the growing number of Nepali learners also work well. The school recognises that further work is needed to improve participation of this group in, for example, residential activities, and to improve the students' success in the sixth form. The house system supports students' pastoral development well, and recent improvements in the use of progress data have secured improved academic guidance. The majority of students are able to talk confidently about levels they are working at, and the targets they are given to pursue, but there is no system in place to track learners' developing key/transferable skills as they move through the school. This affects how effectively teachers plan for this in lessons. Support for gifted and talented students has improved, and Key Stage 3 and 4 master classes and enrichment clubs, for all year groups, have

been particularly effective. The setting up of the student learning centre has been a positive development, provides very good support for a range of vulnerable learners, and has contributed considerably to reducing long-term absence and exclusions. The school has identified the need to develop further information, advice and guidance across all key stages, including making Key Stage 3 students more aware of post-16 pathways and equipping all students to make more informed choices about these.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has a clear vision and communicates well with all members of the school community. Comprehensive systems for tracking students' progress have been established, and these are being used to pinpoint weaknesses in achievement that have been identified during the last three years. The impact of this is beginning to bring the necessary improvements in students' performances. There is a positive team spirit among the staff, and senior leaders are supporting each other well as they build the capacity of leadership and management of middle leaders. Subject and other leaders are increasingly involved in monitoring the performance of the school, and have a satisfactory understanding of the strengths and weaknesses. Action plans are not, however, clear enough about how they will recognise when improvement has been made. Their involvement, and the effective use of the information gained, are contributing to the marked improvements that are underway. However, many of the changes have not been in place long enough to secure the consistently good provision needed to promote good achievement. There are good arrangements for continuing professional development, clearly linked to appropriate school development priorities. Teachers have benefited from professional development associated with the specialism. The school makes a substantial contribution to community cohesion. The governors have a good grasp of their roles, but are under strength and do not fully represent the diverse community which the school serves. They are well informed, but strategies for holding the school to account are not yet sufficiently demanding of the school's managers.

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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?	3	3
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?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

31 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sandhurst School, Sandhurst, GU47 0SD

Thank you for your help and for taking the time to talk to us during the recent inspection. I am writing to you to tell you about our main findings. We judged the school to be satisfactory and improving.

Examination results are beginning to improve, and you make satisfactory progress in your time at school. We saw some good lessons during the inspection, but found this to be uneven for some of you because not all the teaching is good enough. Some lessons that we saw were not well matched to your potential, and did not do enough to challenge you to think harder. We were very impressed with how you behaved in lessons. The senior staff know that they have to improve teaching so that you are set appropriately matched work. You can help by using your initiative to become more independent learners.

Staff work hard to care for and support you. They have done a great deal to help those of you who find learning difficult or who have fallen behind. Your understanding of how you can make a positive contribution to the lives of others, both in school and beyond, is good. We were very pleased to see that some changes are underway in the offer for you at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. You told us that you would welcome more choice and more advice on what to choose, so we have asked that the school press on with this and introduce a better match of courses to meet your needs.

There have been a number of recent changes to the school's leadership and management. This has been well managed, and parents tell us that they are very happy with this aspect of the school. The changes are helping to improve the school, but we have asked the school to ensure that the school's leaders and managers look closely at the impact of the actions that they are taking to improve your achievements.

The inspection team wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Palk

Her Majesty's Inspector