

# Sir William Ramsay School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110506
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	325161
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alan Taylor-Bennett HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	998
Sixth form	168
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Richard Morris
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Gaynor Comber
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 October 2005
<b>School address</b>	Rose Avenue Hazlemere High Wycombe HP15 7UB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 815 211
<b>Fax number</b>	01494 816 734

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Sir William Ramsay School is a popular and oversubscribed non-selective school in an area served by grammar schools. It has a large catchment area which has a more diverse social and ethnic population than is found in its vicinity. It has two special units. One supports learners with a hearing impairment and the other serves those with a physical disability. The school has achieved the Artsmark Gold the Sportsmark and the Investors in People award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Sir William Ramsay School provides a good quality of education for its students. It is a happy school with a justifiable sense of pride in the extent to which it has improved over the last few years. The headteacher's obvious passion and commitment have made the school a diverse yet inclusive and close-knit community. Governors support the school's development extremely well. Staff, students and parents place great value on what has been achieved. One parent represented the views of many in saying, 'Under the current head, I feel this school has improved considerably. I am very happy with the teaching and overall care my children receive.' Students are well behaved around the site and in lessons, and there is a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere.

Students make good progress and they achieve well. This is a direct consequence of the good care and support provided by staff, and an outstandingly good curriculum. It is also because of the good quality of much of the teaching. However, too few lessons result in outstanding progress being made. This is because students are not always actively involved in their learning. Students who need special provision for any reason are well cared for and make good progress as a result. Senior staff support the work of middle leaders, and hold them to account for results. There is still too much variation in the performance of students in different subject areas, however. The school recognises this and has plans to ensure that new systems to measure the progress that students are making will result in more consistent and more rigorous academic guidance, and accountability, across all subject areas.

There is a strong sense of community in the school. Students also have opportunities to engage productively with the local community via links with other schools, through celebrations and festivals, and charity work. The school's visual arts specialism is used in an exemplary fashion to engage and motivate students in the specialist subjects; to drive up standards across the whole school, for the benefit of the community; and in working with other local schools, to assist them to develop their visual and performing arts provision. This is a vibrant aspect of the work of the school. The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory. The school has a good understanding of its place in the community and has considered how it can contribute directly and strategically to improving the community cohesion in its locality. It has yet to identify how it can then evaluate the impact of this work.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

The quality of education in the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards are in line with national averages, and achievement is satisfactory overall. The number of passes at A level is slightly above average, although the proportion of higher grades is below average. This reflects the ability of students on entry to the school. Results in vocational subjects are good, with a large proportion of students gaining pass grades. There is evidence of a rising trend in standards, although there are some subjects in which achievement is below expectations. Students' attitudes to work are good. Teaching is good, although there is relatively little that is outstanding. Most students are eager to learn, and respond well to the good level of challenge presented in lessons and in private study. Although attendance is broadly satisfactory, the extent of unauthorised absence is inhibiting the impact of this good teaching on the achievement and standards of a sizeable minority. This has not been addressed successfully so far. Students participate well in a wide range of activities and appreciate the importance of healthy lifestyles. Students are aware of their learning goals but, although their progress against targets is monitored, not all

students feel that mentoring is always effective. Guidance provided in preparing for post-16 education is good, and the advice that they are given, particularly that related to their future careers, is appreciated by students. Links with other consortium schools and colleges ensure that the school is well placed to meet the career needs of its students. The curriculum is outstanding because it matches the needs and aspirations of students very well. There is a wide range of traditional AS and A2 courses, and vocational courses leading to Level 1, 2 and 3 qualifications. In addition, there is a wide range of enrichment opportunities.

Aspects of leadership are good, and management is satisfactory. Staff with responsibilities in the sixth form are well supported and held to account. They have a good grasp of the current strengths and weaknesses of sixth form provision. For example, they have identified that there are weaknesses in the way that students' academic attainment is gauged; it does not readily support mentoring, and is not well enough focused on improving learning and progress. The capacity to improve the sixth form is good, because of the very good curriculum and the clear commitment from everyone to improve achievement and standards.

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

- Improve the proportion of outstanding lessons by encouraging students to be more actively engaged in their learning.
- Improve standards in the sixth form by using information about students' attainment to support their progress more effectively.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards have risen over recent years, and students now attain GCSE examination results that are very close to the national average. This represents good achievement in the light of students' starting points, and it is due to good overall progress over Key Stages 3 and 4. Progress is consistently good in mathematics and English, and in the specialist subjects of art and design, textiles and photography. The school sets itself challenging targets, including in its specialist subjects, and achieves well against them. The progress made by students in science over Key Stage 4 has been inadequate in recent years. The school's responses have been effective, and progress is now satisfactory and improving in this subject. The school is sensitive to the relative achievements of different groups of learners and it has accurately prioritised the progress of students of Black Caribbean origin, and that of more-able students, for improvement. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, and those who have a statement of special educational needs achieve very well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

There is an atmosphere of cooperation and trust in the school, and there are harmonious relationships in which all students, regardless of their background or needs, are respected and supported. As one student said, 'One of the strengths of SWR is that no one feels left out.' Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students spoke warmly about how they valued the '...unique things - the big productions, out-of-school activities and the lessons,' and the fact that '...the school is united - there are lots of events where the whole school is together'. Students feel safe in school and are aware of how to maintain a healthy and safe lifestyle. They respond positively to the school's commitment to promoting healthy eating. They know who to speak to if they have a problem, and they are confident about

doing so. Bullying is rare, and students impressed upon inspectors that if it happens, 'It is all sorted out quickly once a member of staff is involved,' sometimes by making use of the school's Bullying Helpline. Behaviour is good, and this contributes to the purposeful learning environment within classrooms and the orderly conduct around the school site. In lessons, students are willing - if rather passive - learners, and there is an atmosphere of respect. They enjoy being active in the community, working in local primary and secondary schools, and raising impressive amounts of money for charity. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is good due to the good progress they make in English and mathematics, the good provision of information and guidance, and the good teamwork skills that they acquire. Attendance has risen from below average to become satisfactory, due to the school's strenuous efforts to encourage students to come to school regularly.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school's good monitoring of the quality of teaching across all subject areas has resulted in teaching and learning being good overall. Teachers motivate students by recognising individuals' learning styles and by using appropriate resources. Lessons are very well planned, and aims and objectives are shared with students, giving a clear sense of purpose to activities. This results in a good working atmosphere in lessons, and in good progress being made. However, there is relatively little outstanding teaching and learning in the school. The effect of this is that students are frequently recipients of knowledge presented to them, rather than active and energetic participants in learning. This prevents their progress being very good or outstanding.

Teachers keep appropriate records and know their students' needs well, enabling accurate targets to be set and their progress to be monitored and reported. Students' work is regularly marked, although information given to students to ensure that they know how to improve their work is not always specific or clear enough.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is broad and balanced, and meets the needs of its students very well. Students have the opportunity to choose from a broad range of vocational qualifications in addition to the more established GCSE options. The school's specialist status is a key aspect of its outstanding curriculum. There are a large number of interesting and relevant arts-based courses offered, and strong links across departments provide a range of exciting theme days and cross-curricular experiences. This provision is enhanced by a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, and many opportunities for students to work with other organisations and groups in the local community. The development of key skills needed for the world of work has been prioritised, and there is very good provision for this across the curriculum and within personal, social and health education lessons. For example, the Year 7 curriculum focuses on the development of learning skills and there are identified themes to which all departments contribute. Opportunities exist for some students to undertake examination courses earlier than is usual, if they are ready. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum provides a very good variety of pathways involving Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and diploma programmes which complement existing GCSE courses. There are good links with local colleges and the Skills Centre. There is a wide range of booster classes

providing additional learning opportunities, extra-curricular clubs, societies, activities and trips organised by the school. These are well supported and valued by students.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Good care, guidance and support enable students to feel safe, make good progress in their learning, and enjoy good personal development. Child protection procedures are secure, and health and safety issues are fully addressed. Several parents commented positively on the care their children receive, praising 'the pastoral efforts and sense of community in the school' and 'the caring environment' established. Strategies for dealing with misbehaviour are successful, and there has been a steady reduction in the number of fixed-term exclusions over recent years. The provision to support vulnerable students, including those with physical or learning disabilities and/or difficulties, is well planned and effective. As a result, the progress of these students is at least as good as that of other students in the school. A few students speak English as an additional language, and provision for them is also good. The quality of the arrangements for managing the transition from primary schools to Year 7 is good, because of the extensive links established between the schools, and the close communication with families of students about to enter the school. As a consequence, Year 7 students settle quickly and happily, enthusiastically participating in lessons and out-of-school activities. The school has always sought to support the progress of students individually and across identified groups, and has established the mechanisms by which tutors and pastoral staff to do this. Having recognised a lack of refinement in these systems, a new progress-monitoring and mentoring system has been introduced this academic year. This is an important development which is beginning to have a positive impact, but it has not had time to become embedded in the work of the school and be as effective as the school would wish.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The school has made good progress in addressing the areas identified for improvement in the previous inspection, and doing so has moved the school on. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding, and she is well supported by a good senior management team. She has established a very clear sense of the school's identity and its vision, and she communicates this clearly to students, parents and the community. She and her staff are clearly committed to improving the achievement of students, and staff have a good understanding of what needs to be done to achieve this. The school sets appropriately challenging targets for its overall performance, and its evaluation of how it has done against them is done well. Although the direction and support given by middle leaders is good overall, it is variable in quality, and whole-school strategies do not have the desired impact in every classroom. Although the quality of education provided in the sixth form is satisfactory, some aspects, such as attendance, are not monitored or responded to energetically enough. Senior staff and middle leaders work closely to ensure consistency in, and impact from, their lesson observations. There are plans to begin using students to evaluate the quality of learning in lessons.

The visual arts college specialism is outstandingly well led and managed. It has an appreciable positive impact on the achievement of students across the school and it makes a strong contribution to the school's ethos. There are particularly effective learning and recreational links with other local schools and the community, and a developing international dimension.

By this and other means, students demonstrate a good understanding of both national and international issues and have the capacity to become good citizens.

Strategic planning, which is closely linked to financial management, is very well focused on improving standards, and plans are reviewed regularly. The school provides good value for money. Governance is outstanding. Governors are knowledgeable regarding the strengths and developmental needs of the school, and they have a very good understanding of how improvements can be made. They are well informed, and very well placed to drive development and challenge performance. Resources are well deployed and day-to-day financial management is good. The capacity for staff and governors to bring about further improvement is therefore good.



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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**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	2

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<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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	3
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2	2
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?	2	3

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	3
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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	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	

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

31 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir William Ramsay School, High Wycombe, HP15 7UB

Thank you for the welcome you showed to me and the other inspectors who visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you and getting to know your school. You are clearly proud of your school and wanted us to know that you think it is a good place to be, and we agree with you. The school is providing you with a good education. We saw that you are confident and positive young people, who are benefiting from all that the school is doing to support and guide you. The majority of you respond well to the good teaching, but you have more to offer in lessons, and are not always challenged or engaged enough in debate and questioning about the work. The visual arts specialism is giving you lots of opportunities to be involved in a wide range of projects and activities in school, with pupils and students from local schools, and in your local community. This is clearly an impressive aspect of your school's work.

Your school is well led, and your headteacher is a person of great energy and commitment. She, the governors and the staff, all want the best for you and they are doing this well at the moment. They want to do even better, and we have asked your headteacher to do the following to help to improve the school further.

- Have teachers find ways of getting you more actively involved in your learning in lessons.
- In the sixth form, continue to check your progress regularly, and use the information obtained to guide your progress more carefully.

My very best wishes to the school for its continued development, and to you for your happiness and success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Alan Taylor-Bennett

Her Majesty's Inspector