

Sir William Romney's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115779
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326273
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Robin Gaff

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	534
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Henderson
Headteacher	Steven Mackay
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
School address	Lowfield Road Tetbury GL8 8AE
Telephone number	01666 502378
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sir William Romney's School is smaller than average, having been an 11 to 16 school since September 2007. The school serves a very wide rural area, and recruits students from a large number of primary schools. It works in a consortium of five local schools and colleges to provide vocational courses for students in Years 10 and 11. The great majority of students are of White British heritage. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. It was awarded performing and visual arts college status in 2005, and has gained Artsmark Silver and Healthy Schools awards, as well as the British Council International School Intermediate Award, which it achieved in 2006. Childcare is provided by a private company at the leisure centre adjacent to the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Sir William Romney's is a satisfactory school. It has made significant improvements since the last inspection, for example in the breadth of its curriculum, and in students' behaviour, both of which are good. Leadership and management, and the school's capacity to improve further, are satisfactory. The appointment of the new headteacher from the start of this term has energised the whole community. One parent said, 'I am excited by the headteacher's enthusiasm for the school – he has made considerable changes since September.' Staff, and many students, echo this sentiment. Clear priorities for improvement, particularly the need to raise standards in GCSE examinations, have been identified. The school is monitoring more closely the effectiveness of teaching in promoting learning and this is already having a positive impact on the progress students make in lessons.

Students' achievement is satisfactory and standards are in line with the national averages. Although preliminary results indicate that standards at the end of Key Stage 3 rose in 2008, those in the GCSE examinations were below average, and did not meet the school's targets. Students made less progress than expected. The school is aware of the reasons for this underperformance and is ensuring that they are being addressed. Staff are monitoring more closely students' progress and the levels they are reaching, and are intervening when they fall short of their targets. This has led to an improvement in students' progress, which is satisfactory, and a rise in the standards they are attaining. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is much good, and some outstanding teaching, but some teachers do not match their lessons sufficiently well to students' needs. Marking does not always give students sufficient guidance on what to do next to improve their work.

Students' personal development is good. Students clearly enjoy coming to school and they have positive attitudes towards learning, their teachers and each other. One parent commented in particular about her son's pride in belonging to Sir William Romney's School, and one Year 9 girl said, 'We are a happy school!' Students are polite and welcoming towards visitors, and behave well in lessons and around the school. Their enjoyment of school is demonstrated in particular by their willingness to take part in after-school activities such as sport and drama, despite the long distances that many of them have to travel, and their reliance on buses to make the journey. The school has strong and effective systems for pastoral support and guidance, and students are very appreciative of the staff's approachability. There is good support for vulnerable students, as well as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and behavioural issues.

The school's specialist status in the visual and performing arts is having a positive impact across the school. High quality displays around the school, some completed by students and others by local artists, enhance students' cultural awareness. The school offers an impressive range of extra-curricular arts-based experiences. In the wider community, staff and students have helped local primary schools to develop their expertise, and have contributed to the town's arts festival. A large number of students enjoy taking part in youth theatre productions. The impact of specialist status on students' attainment is more variable. Students perform well at GCSE in art, but results have been below average in dance and in drama.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rate of students' progress by ensuring that good and outstanding practice in teaching is extended more widely.

- Make better use of information about students' attainment to ensure that teaching meets their individual needs.
- Mark students' work more effectively to give them clear guidance about how they can reach their targets.

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' attainment at the end of Year 9, reflected in the preliminary test results for 2008, is broadly average. However, the GCSE results in 2008 were below average, although those in English, mathematics and science were in line with national averages. In a number of other subjects, including history and health and social care, the results were below average. These results also fell below the school's own predictions, especially for students in the middle range of ability. The school has improved the reliability of its assessment procedures, as well as the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence from its own records and inspectors' observations indicate that standards in Years 10 and 11 are now broadly average. Students join the school with average levels of attainment and leave with standards that are in line with national averages. This indicates that students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress during their time at the school. Recent results show that students' progress in mathematics, which was an area of weakness, is improving and is now satisfactory in both key stages.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students make a good contribution to their school and to wider communities. For example, prefects in Year 11 play an active and well respected role in their school. Through the school's arts specialism, students develop a good awareness of their own and other cultures, including their spiritual dimension. For example, the 'hunger cloth' project, combining work in art and religious education, successfully involved students in learning from working with professional artists, and with local and diocesan churches. Students show good concern for others through their organisation of fund-raising events. They develop leadership skills through the Youth Arts Leader award, peer mentoring and working with local primary schools. They show they are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle by their regular participation in physical activities, and their choice of healthy options in the school canteen.

An orderly, respectful atmosphere exists around the school. Behaviour in lessons and at break and lunchtimes is good, and students feel that the school is a safe place. Whilst a few parents expressed concerns about behaviour, others were positive about its improvement in recent years. Students and parents are confident that staff deal with any bullying incidents effectively. Attendance is broadly average. However, despite the use of an increasing range of strategies to improve attendance, there remain a very small number of persistent non-attendees. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Improvements in teaching and learning are leading to students attaining higher standards and making better progress than are indicated by recent GCSE results. In many lessons, students benefit from teachers' expertise in and enthusiasm for their subjects, and from their high expectations, which encourage students to take pride in their work. Students and their parents are very appreciative of teachers' willingness to provide students with extra help and tuition during lunchtimes and after school. Teachers plan their lessons carefully to include a variety of activities. For example, in an outstanding Year 7 drama lesson, students made excellent progress and showed their enjoyment by responding very positively to a series of practical tasks, which included working on their own, in groups and as a whole class. Teachers do not always tailor activities sufficiently well to match students' individual abilities and preferred learning styles. A few lessons lack pace, challenge and opportunities for practical work. This restricts the amount of progress that students make. A number of teachers use questioning well in class to develop students' understanding, and make detailed and informative comments on their written work, but this is not yet done consistently across the school. Too often, marking is a recognition that work has been completed and includes comments that relate to presentation, rather than providing support to help students develop their work further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum now provides a good match to students' needs, interests and abilities, although some of the improvements made recently, for example the wider range of vocational courses, have not yet been reflected in improved examination results. Students in Years 7 to 9 are well motivated by the new, topic-based 'Skills' curriculum, which helps them to make a smooth transition from primary school by, for example, linking subjects such as history and geography. The school gives students a good range of courses from which to select in Years 10 and 11, in large part because of the school's effective cooperation with other local providers to offer vocational courses. A team of specialist staff and visiting speakers teaches the high quality personal, social, health and citizenship programme, with the result that students value and enjoy the subject more.

Students benefit from good opportunities for work-related learning, including a well thought-out work experience programme. Many of them comment on the good range of extra-curricular activities, including pottery, choral singing, guitar, drum and orchestra groups, as well as very well attended drama clubs. Trips, visits and exchanges with France and Germany make a good contribution to students' social and cultural development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Support for students when they join the school is good. Students and parents comment very positively about how students are made welcome, and how quickly they settle in to the school. One parent commented, 'From having a child who was not keen to go to school, he is now eager to go each day and is flourishing.' The school has established an effective system of rewards and sanctions, which students understand, and which has helped to improve behaviour.

Safeguarding arrangements are securely in place. Advice and guidance on future courses and careers is thorough, and enables students to make informed choices for their future. The school makes good use of the expertise of external professionals, as well as its own resources, such as the 'Phoenix Room', which provides a quiet space and expert staff to support students.

There is an improving picture of academic guidance with the increasing involvement of the form tutor and closer liaison between academic and pastoral staff. However, the assessment and tracking of students' progress are inconsistent. Staff regularly monitor students' progress and share the results with students and their parents, but do not always do enough to ensure that students understand their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

School leaders have successfully managed the period of transition following the closure of the school's sixth form, which resulted in staffing and financial problems which they are well on the way to overcoming. They have a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and have established a shared vision for the school's future development. The headteacher and senior staff are implementing detailed plans to secure the improvement in standards which is already evident, and are closely monitoring, and improving, the quality of teaching and learning. Middle leaders are successfully leading developments in the teaching of core subjects, including mathematics and science, by including aspects of the school's specialism in lessons. The governors are making a satisfactory contribution to the school's development by supporting the leadership team, challenging and helping to refine its plans when appropriate.

The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It enables students to engage successfully with the local community through, for example, delivering its mission as a specialist school, and to learn about the range of traditions represented in this country. The school also works hard to expose students to the wider world. It enables them to actively support two schools in Ethiopia, take part in exchange visits to France and Germany, and to learn about global issues by exploring a range of topics such as the impact of HIV across the world.

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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
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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
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
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
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**

5 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir William Romney's School, Tetbury, GL8 8AE

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I should like to thank you all for your contribution to the recent inspection. We all enjoyed meeting you and listening to what you had to tell us about your school. I am writing to you to let you know what we found.

Sir William Romney's is giving you a satisfactory education. Lots of you told us you think it is improving, and we agree. Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. However, we saw much good, and some outstanding teaching, and you told us how much you appreciate your teachers' willingness to give you extra help when you need it. We think they need to give you more advice about what you need to do to make your work even better. Your new headteacher, all the staff, and the governors are working very hard to improve teaching and learning even more, so that you can go on to gain the best qualifications you can.

We were all impressed by your behaviour around the school and in lessons. You tell us that you are not particularly worried about bullying, because you feel the school deals with it well. You make good use of your opportunities to contribute to the school, the local, and the wider community. This is helping you to develop skills like teamwork which will stand you in good stead when you go on to further education and employment. You appreciate the benefits of belonging to a specialist arts college, and you enjoy taking part in the out-of-school activities the school provides.

To make the school even better, we have asked the staff and the governors to do three things:

- Ensure teachers adopt the best practices already in the school to help you make even better progress and gain higher grades.
- Use information on how well you are doing to ensure that teaching effectively matches your individual needs
- Ensure teachers give you enough detailed written advice in their marking to help you know what to do to improve your work.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Robin Gaff Lead inspector