

St George's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118227
Local Authority	Isle of Wight
Inspection number	326789
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Jo Curd

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	138
Sixth form	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Justine Turner
Headteacher	Susan Holman
Date of previous school inspection	21 June 2006
School address	Watergate Rd Newport PO30 1XW
Telephone number	01983 524634
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The majority of students in this relatively large special school are boys. Nearly all are of White British heritage. Very few have English as an additional language. The proportion eligible for free school meals is higher than in most other schools. All the students have statements to support diverse, complex and often profound learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These include autistic spectrum disorders, physical disabilities and learning difficulties. A very few students are looked after by the local authority or foster providers. The school has achieved National Healthy School Status and Artsmark at gold level. Numbers in the school and sixth form are rising significantly.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Students' achievement and their personal development and well-being are all excellent in this outstanding school. Due to extremely effective levels of care, guidance and support and a highly relevant and practical curriculum, students have very positive attitudes to life and behave very well. Most parents are extremely pleased with what the school provides for their young people. One said, 'My son has come on in leaps and bounds and is very happy there.'

Exceptionally strong leaders and managers know the school and its students very well. They use their highly accurate, if occasionally slightly modest, monitoring and evaluation to identify and address any areas of weakness. They are relentless in their desire to improve provision and outcomes for all students. A highly ambitious, but realistic vision for the school and students has led to the development of an outstanding curriculum. A notable example of this is the 'Dragon' project, an extremely inspiring outdoor arts initiative involving all students throughout the school. Together students, staff and professional artists are creating an outdoor learning environment including 'archaeology' of a life-size ground level dinosaur, willow classrooms and full-sized carved and sculptured furniture.

The school has developed well since the last inspection notably in the detail and rigour of assessments, provision and challenge in the sixth form and resources and use of information and communication technology (ICT). In conjunction with the local authority the school is managing the rise in numbers effectively and creatively. However, storage, particularly of students' personal equipment such as standing frames and wheelchairs, is proving to be a challenge. The staff team is also expanding rapidly to meet the needs of pupils. While learning is outstanding, due to excellent opportunities and highly effective care and support, the quality of teaching is good. Some teachers and learning support assistants are not aware of the school's approach to some finer details of teaching, including sounds and letter formation, which occasionally leads to some minor variations for some students.

Largely because of extremely effective support and excellent relationships throughout the school, students are well behaved, settled and confident. Views and experiences of parents, students and staff are summed up in the words of one mother who said, 'I feel there is a real vibrancy about the school, whenever I visit I am aware everyone has something positive to say about my child not just the staff in his class but also the staff and students across the school.' Most students enjoy their time at school greatly. Students work and play safely together because they are supported well and engaged in interesting, relevant activities. They all make highly significant contributions to the school and wider community through caring and being cared for, serving on the school council and taking part in local and national events. Students' positive views and actions successfully contributed to the school's recent health accreditation. Due to excellent achievement, very positive self-esteem and highly effective transition processes, students are extremely well prepared for later life and learning.

Staff are passionate about provision for students with additional needs in and beyond the school. Highly effective links with parents, other professionals and schools are having a very strong impact on community cohesion. Parents are supported as they develop skills to understand and integrate their young people into the wider world. Staff and pupils in other schools are guided on how to integrate pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Employees in shops, cafes and museums are taught how to make their services more accessible to a population with diverse needs.

Due to extremely effective leadership and management, the commitment and passion of the staff and a highly successful track record, capacity for further improvement is excellent.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding because staff take the needs of each individual into close account and strive to maximise achievement and preparation for later life and learning. Some continue with their specialist teachers, achieving well and receiving very high quality care and support. Others join a separate sixth form area where, despite constraints on accommodation, resources are successfully arranged to reflect growing independence and maturity. The very strong focus on individual interests and strengths is central to the personalised curriculum. This is so practical and relevant that some students join the sixth form from mainstream schools. Aspirations and opportunities for these students are high but realistic. Many students achieve up to seven nationally accredited qualifications on occasion including GCSE mathematics and Art. Their joint positions of chair, secretary and treasurer with adults for the 'Dragon' project are very real and meaningful roles. Very close links with the college and potential employers strengthen transition for when students leave St George's. Work experience is of high quality and relevant. Many of the students are confident and amiable. Guidance for their 'next steps' is sensitive and realistic. The vast majority go on to college or work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of fine details in teaching, including the way letters of the alphabet are taught, by making sure that all staff know and follow the school's agreed approaches.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students achieve significantly well in this extremely caring and supportive school. The whole school community is rightly proud of how well each student is progressing. Rigorous assessments show that all pupils are making very good progress in nationally recognised aspects of their learning. These compare favourably with the achievement of similar students across the country. Students generally achieve extremely well in ICT because resources are extremely appropriate, the curriculum is so relevant and the interest and motivation of many is so high. Other major achievements include significant improvements in communication, behaviour and leadership skills. Some students have won national design awards, sung in local concerts, spoken at local conferences and led primary workshops in the 'Dragon project', one has secured a job as learning support assistant at the school and one has been invited back to work experience to meet royalty.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students are very friendly, considerate and well behaved. The small minority who are prone to more challenging behaviour have made extremely good progress and the school is a calm, orderly, safe place to learn and work. Largely because of excellent support and a personalised timetable, some older students who have caused significant disruption in the past are now calm and well integrated. Attendance is rising and, compared to similar students elsewhere, is good. The highly inclusive ethos of the school, the inspiring curriculum and excellent relationships with staff all contribute to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural

development. Students are particularly respectful, accepting and supportive of each other. One said, 'we all look after each other, we know our strengths and difficulties and we all value and help each other.' A parent commented, 'Within a very short time of my daughter starting St George's I saw a great transformation in her happiness, confidence and social skills. She is thriving in all aspects of school and enjoys every day.' Students contribute exceptionally well to the school and wider community through the active school council which has helped develop playground activities and raised money for charity, taking part in local events such as choir and rock concerts and supporting each other through worries and difficulties. Because they achieve so well, spend considerable time preparing for transition and have such high, positive attitudes and self-esteem, they are all extremely well prepared for later life and learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Learning is excellent because support is highly effective and the curriculum is so effective, broad and practical. Most lessons are extremely relevant, focusing on practical tasks in 'real-life situations'. One example was cookery where students make lists of ingredients, go to find them in the supermarket, use money to pay, cook them and invite parents in to share the feast. Another example was using ratios of concrete, water and paper to make durable seats and 'bug domes' as part of the 'Dragon' project. Lessons are usually at least good. Teachers use their detailed knowledge of students to plan imaginative and interesting lessons. Staff work extremely well together to meet the emotional, social and learning needs of students, ensuring that lessons are calm and any unrest is managed as smoothly as possible. Teachers and learning support assistants are not always aware of school policies for finer elements of teaching, such as approaches to letter sounds and formation. As a result these are not always implemented consistently throughout the school and can be confusing and unhelpful to some students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very broad and balanced. It combines strong emphasis on key skills, creativity and personal, social and health education extremely well. This combination successfully contributes to the enjoyment and achievement of all students. Individualised programmes of study are ambitious and relevant. They successfully focus on basic skills of independence, choice, confidence, creativity, English, mathematics and ICT which students need in the present and future. The school's very high levels of expressive and performing arts have been recognised locally and nationally in awards, concerts and competitions. Provision for ICT has improved greatly since the school's last inspection. Highly appropriate and well-chosen equipment such as touch-screen computer screens also contribute well to very high achievement, motivation and enjoyment. Students excitedly use interactive technology together and responsibly take photographs of each other for school publications and assessment records. A range of buttons and switches help others to communicate, make choices and engage in their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Excellent care guidance and support contribute strongly to pupils' high levels of enjoyment and success at school. Systems to safeguard their health and safety are thorough and well

organised. All the staff are very committed to the welfare and development of their students. This is central to their outstanding links with parents and other professionals. One parent said, 'They not only support, give advice and help my daughter, they have helped me too.' Parents visiting the school were full of praise for the excellent way their young people are valued, nurtured and cared for in the school. Assessments have become far more rigorous recently. Staff use these to plan interesting and effective lessons, write pertinent, relevant individual educational plans and develop ambitious but realistic targets for each student.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Outstanding leadership and management are at the heart of this school's improvement and success. All leaders and managers know the school and its students extremely well and are highly passionate about the provision and outcomes for each individual. They are excellent role models and inspire very good relationships and teamwork. The headteacher astutely identifies individual strengths in her staff and deploys these deftly and appropriately. Each member of staff, parent, governor and student is a key part of the whole school community. Governance is excellent, providing very high levels of support and challenge. Governors are extremely committed, knowledgeable, perceptive and active in their desire for all the students to do well. Although highly rigorous monitoring ensures that lessons are effective and any weaknesses addressed, it does not always look at the finer details of teaching and their consistency across the school. Excellent links with parents, other professionals, other schools and the community enhance the curriculum, achievement and support and help both the school and students to thrive.

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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?	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	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	1

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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
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 learners' needs?	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?	1	1

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 eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

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

02 September 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of St George's School, Newport, PO30 1XW

Thank you all for being so friendly and helpful when I came to your school recently. I enjoyed visiting some of you at camp, having lunch with others and watching many of you work and play. I expect that by now you have finished painting the shed; it certainly looked very attractive when I left. I thought the 'Dragon' project was amazing; I loved finding the dinosaur bones and going into the willow domes and structures. I am sure all your other visitors will love it too.

You go to an outstanding school. You are all doing extremely well because you are supported very effectively and learn so many interesting practical things. I know that your families, governors and staff are extremely proud of you all. Congratulations to those of you who have places at college or jobs and to those of you who have recently won awards and prizes in competitions. No wonder so many more young people want to come and be part of your school. You all learn extremely well. Teaching is good but occasionally small things, such as the way some of you are taught the sounds of letters or how to write them, varies between classes, which can sometimes be unhelpful and confusing.

There is just one main thing that would make your school even better. This is for leaders to:

- agree how details, such as letter formation, will be taught and make sure this is the same throughout the school. I think this will improve teaching and help some of you to achieve even more.

I wish you and your families all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Jo Curd

Lead Inspector