

Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118884
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326919
Inspection date	30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Taylor-Bennett HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	947
Sixth form	339
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jonathan Spencer
Headteacher	Matthew Baxter
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
School address	Langton Lane Nackington Road Canterbury CT4 7AS
Telephone number	01227 463567
Fax number	01227 456486

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the progress made by students over their time at the school; the effectiveness of the school's work to improve the quality of all teaching to good or outstanding; how well students are prepared for life in a culturally and ethnically diverse Britain; and how effectively the school monitors the achievement of students and uses this information to improve standards.

Inspectors gathered evidence from: lesson observations; scrutiny of students' work, assessment information and documents; and interviews and discussions. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys is a selective school serving Canterbury and its outlying towns and villages. It has a large sixth form to which girls are admitted. There is a local authority unit in the school for boys with autism spectrum disorders. The school is a specialist science college and it has achieved the International School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys provides a good quality of education for its students. Achievement is good because the targets the school sets are appropriately demanding and students make good progress during their time at the school, reaching very high standards. The school's science specialism is a vibrant aspect of its work. It is used to motivate, engage and stimulate students, and provides opportunities to excel. Specialist targets are met and many are exceeded. The achievement of the relatively small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those working in the autism spectrum disorder base, is supported well and there is no difference between their achievement and well-being and those of their peers.

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. The school is a happy community that enables students to develop the skills and attitudes they need for work and higher education. There is an evident love of learning and a real value attached to achievement. Students show respect and admiration for each other's achievements and there is a strong sense of inclusion. Differences are not simply tolerated, they are valued. One Year 11 boy explained, 'Just like students in other schools respect someone if they are brilliant at sport, here you get respect for anything you are good at, including being academically outstanding.' Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Students display positive attitudes, readily take on responsibility and, as a consequence, develop very good team and leadership skills. A mature understanding of the world beyond the local community is developed through visits, business links, an impressive programme of visiting speakers, and international contacts with other schools. Students are encouraged to play a significant role in the life of the school. They appreciate being listened to and feel valued when their views are acted upon. One student explained that he felt well prepared for life beyond school because 'The school has given me the confidence to be able to meet the challenges of new situations.' The school works very successfully with other local schools to assist their pupils to further develop their enjoyment of science and mathematics.

Most lessons are good and some are outstanding. They are usually well planned, have pace and provide appropriate challenge to students. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and have positive working relationships with students. Occasionally too much time is spent by teachers imparting knowledge when students could be more actively engaged in responding to challenging ideas, questioning their own understanding in group work, and sharing their own insights. This lack of active involvement prevents progress being outstanding in some lessons. The school recognises that, although the marking of homework and classwork is generally good, it is inconsistent in its frequency and quality.

The school provides an outstanding curriculum. There is an impressive range of extra-curricular activities on offer and the significant amount of learning that takes place because of their quality, and the high levels of participation, is an important aspect of the achievement of students. In the lower school the timetable is regularly reorganised to enable extended learning time. Students enjoy the opportunity this gives them to immerse themselves in a longer project or a piece of research. In Key Stage 4 there is a course specifically designed to introduce students to the history of ideas covering the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and a variety of social, scientific and political theories from the 19th and 20th centuries. Students gain authentic insight into the academic, research and vocational possibilities in higher education via the Langton Star Centre and the opportunities it affords for participation in scientific research of

international significance with partners such as the European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN) and an international pharmaceutical company. Some students' outstanding contributions to this work are nationally and internationally recognised. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's provision. One said, 'We really love the school. It offers a wealth of opportunities for our sons, who are thriving there.'

The care shown for the well-being of students is outstanding. Teachers take time to get to know individual students and support them very well. The school is diligent about students' safety in school and beyond and ensures that they have a good understanding of how to stay safe and look after each other. Safeguarding procedures meet all of the regulations. Good systems are in place to ensure the appropriate conditions for progress to be made, but there is insufficient precision in the extent to which these systems are used to monitor progress each term. This limits the extent to which teaching is informed by assessment and learning styles can be suited to individuals and, as a consequence, prevents progress being outstanding in all year groups. As a result, not all of the students who could attain the highest grades at GCSE do so.

The school is well led by staff who have the best interests of students' welfare and academic progress at heart. The headteacher and his senior team offer enthusiastic support for providing students with a very wide range of opportunities to achieve, and they delight in their successes. The school evaluates its work honestly but with insufficient precision to challenge some practices that, although currently successful, do not necessarily support the school's ambition for excellence. Governors support the work of the school with energy and commitment but do not challenge the school sufficiently about how it is checking the progress made by all students at important points in each key stage. The school offers good support for its local community through its links with primary schools and its partnerships with specific local groups, but it has yet to evaluate the extent to which this work has contributed to community cohesion in the locality.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form provision is good as a result of good leadership, good teaching and an outstanding curriculum. Students enjoy their sixth form courses and also take part in the many opportunities there are to develop interests outside of lessons and play a full part in the life of the school. Standards are very high and the progress students make is good. The percentage of students completing all of their courses successfully is consistently very high. Staff provide good support for students to make decisions about careers and higher education and many students gain a place at their first choice university. A significant number of students from other schools join the sixth form at the start of Year 12. They are supported very well and quickly become happy and successful members of the school community. There is an excellent enrichment programme in the sixth form and students take part in a range of high quality activities, including sport, music and participation in the various science research projects. Many are actively involved in charity work, while others act as learning mentors for younger students. Sixth form students are encouraged to contribute to decision making and they are fully consulted about how the school supports and provides for them. As a consequence they develop a very strong sense of belonging, and pride in their school.

Students are assigned individual tutors who help them review their progress. They provide effective support and set challenging targets for improvement but progress is not always

monitored closely and frequently enough. The effect of this is that, although the amount and variety of support is impressive, it is not always targeted or systematic.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the precision with which students' progress is continually monitored and use the information obtained more systematically.
- Give students more opportunities to play an active role in more lessons.

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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?	2	2
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

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

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	1	
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?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	2	
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**

1 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys, Langton Lane, Canterbury CT4 7AS

You will recall that I and other inspectors visited your school recently. We enjoyed spending the day with you. Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for your very significant contributions to the inspection.

Everyone we spoke to wanted us to know how proud they are of their school and it is my judgement that Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys is, indeed, a good school. We were particularly impressed with your mature behaviour, the respect and thoughtfulness that you show for each other, the quality of your working relationships with the staff, and how hard you work in lessons. You make good progress and attain very high standards; this gives you a very good start in life and enables many of you to go to your first choice university.

The science specialism of the school is truly impressive. Some of the science projects we saw underway with external partners in the Langton Star Centre were remarkable. This work has the potential to be considered 'world class'. I was, however, equally impressed by how many of you wanted us to know that there were many other opportunities for you to express and develop your interests and excel in one way or another.

We felt that there were two areas that the headteacher and staff could address when planning for the next stage of the development of the school.

- The school could gauge your progress more often and use the information obtained more systematically. The aim should be that your overall rate of progress becomes outstanding throughout your time at the school.
- In too many of the lessons we visited you were quite passive. You could be given more opportunities to enjoy questioning and discussing the work, being critical of your grasp of concepts, and generally playing a more active role in your learning.

I know that you will wish to reflect on how you can support and contribute to these two improvement points. I wish you and the school every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Alan Taylor-Bennett

Her Majesty's Inspector