

Langtree School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123246
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	327877
Inspection date	5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Cathie Munt HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	542
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Anthony Booth
Headteacher	Mr Rick Holroyd
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
School address	Reading Road Woodcote Reading RG8 0RA
Telephone number	01491 680514
Fax number	01491 682411

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated standards in English, the quality of teaching and learning and the range and impact of the role of middle managers.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, by observing lessons, by scrutinising the school's records of students' achievement and other documentation, and by discussions with students and staff. Parents' responses to questionnaires also informed judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were other than justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This smaller than average, rural school, with a specialism in the performing arts, is heavily oversubscribed. It serves students from a wide locality. The proportion eligible for a free school meal is low. Fewer students than is typical nationally are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Consequently, the number of students who have a home language other than English is very low. Although a higher proportion than usual has a statement of special need, the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to the national figure. A considerable number of students join the school at times other than the start of Key Stage 3.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Langtree has made the transition from being a good school in 2005 to one that is providing an outstanding quality of education. It is held in high regard by the vast majority of students and their parents. Students flourish in a supportively challenging climate that encourages them to give of their best academically and personally. There is no resting on laurels here - each success is celebrated and then staff move on swiftly, always planning how to reach the next level. The desire to be excellent is evident in many aspects of the school's work. One parent summed up the general views when she wrote, 'This was our first choice school, we are not disappointed.'

Leadership and management have developed rapidly at all levels under the exemplary guidance of the headteacher and are outstanding overall. The real strength of the school is the high quality of teamwork whereby everyone, including governors, administrative and support staff, recognises the importance of their role in improving the outputs for students. This is underpinned by a wholehearted commitment to high-quality professional development and training that secures current strengths and develops new skills and competencies. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. He is exceptionally well supported by the committed and able assistant headteachers. Middle managers lead with confidence and their input makes a positive difference to the performance of their departments. They have an excellent grasp of the school's many strengths and are equally clear about the areas that require further development. A wide range of highly successful actions have brought about many impressive improvements in standards, progress, behaviour, teaching and leadership and management practices. This demonstrates an outstanding capacity to improve further. The impressively knowledgeable governing body has an excellent understanding of the issues facing the school. Individually and collectively they play a most effective role in supporting the school as well as challenging the leadership team and holding the school to account.

Parents and carers who responded to the parental questionnaire expressed a very high level of support for the headteacher and staff and for the changes made over the last few years and felt well informed about their children's progress. Many comments related to the excellent support that the school provides for vulnerable students. An example of this was seen in an innovative session led by two skilled and enthusiastic support staff that provided such learners with excellent work-related experiences in music technology, initiated by the performing arts department. Parents' views are sought and taken into account, along with those of students and other stakeholders, when major decisions are being made. The school's attempt to establish a parental focus group, to improve consultation and communication, initially met with limited interest. However, about 20 families have now joined this group. A very small number of responses stated that sometimes emails and phone calls were not responded to in a timely manner.

The standards reached by students in external tests and examinations are consistently and considerably above those of schools nationally. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, exceeds national school norms and has been rising steadily in recent years. The proportions gaining A* and A grades increased from just over a fifth in 2007, to almost a third last year. Results in Key Stage 3 tests remain exceptionally high in mathematics and science and have improved in English. The high level of achievement is a result, not only of high-quality teaching, but also of the work with other organisations that is continually expanding curriculum provision. The school works most effectively with the local college to provide courses, such as engineering, that are not viable

on site. Suitable plans are in place to extend curriculum provision from September for older students. Staff are not complacent and consistently seek ways to improve on results.

The school has worked hard to promote consistency in the quality of teaching and advice across subjects and year groups. The teacher-led 'TRIO' project is a successful example of reflective practice that challenges students' thinking, helping them to exceed their taxing targets. Almost all students make excellent progress in their learning and their all-round achievements compare most favourably with schools nationally. The level of care, guidance and support is excellent, whether for the highest-attaining mathematician or the most nervous student, new to the school. The learning support base provides exceptional support for students who encounter barriers to learning and a host of other effective services provide non-academic information, advice and support.

Students have confidence in the staff and report that they feel safe and happy in school. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place and are updated rigorously. Although most students attend regularly, the few who are absent frequently have a disproportionate impact on the attendance figures in this small school. Data show that actions to minimise absences are having a positive impact, as these students are missing fewer sessions than in previous years.

Management of the specialist area is exceptionally good and fosters the school's vision of continually seeking to raise students' expectations and achievements. The school looks to the future with almost uncontained excitement. Specialist status has contributed effectively to improvement by allowing the school to extend its community provision, develop excellent links with partner schools and the local community and significantly improve its buildings and resources. Modernising the school so that every area is fit for purpose is an ongoing process. Refurbished areas have made a great contribution to the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and learning and provide a clear message that only the best is acceptable. Striking and thought-provoking artwork enhances public areas and is testimony to the students' skills, creativity and confidence in expressing themselves using a range of materials. Advanced plans to rationalise the art and technology rooms are in place and have attracted local sponsorship. Artists and theatre groups in residence provide a wide range of exciting courses for students and the public, and the excellent computer and recording facilities are well used by groups of all ages.

Students show immense pride in their school's specialist performing arts status. A very high proportion take part in musical and drama activities and performances. This makes a major contribution to their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities to develop workplace skills, such as leadership and management and teamwork, are supported most effectively by a plethora of extra-curricular opportunities. Students speak particularly highly of these. Activities include: taking part in the running of the school by joining the student council or mentoring younger students; planning and delivering assemblies on themes such as bullying; and providing technical support for the many productions. Students also engage with the local and wider community by contributing to the local paper, working with primary pupils and retired citizens and raising funds for a partner school in Ghana. One year 11 student said that many students found that there just wasn't enough time in the week to take part in all of the activities that they wanted to. Students showed great insight and sensitivity when articulating how lucky they feel to have access to such opportunities.

An increasing proportion of teaching is of the highest calibre. This accounts for the rapid progress seen in Key Stage 3 and for the increasingly good results in public examinations.

Consistency in teaching has been achieved through robust monitoring and support from the senior leaders, and justifies the headteacher's single-minded focus on 'putting learning first'. Observations during the inspection, confirm that teaching is outstanding overall. Students play their part by sharing ideas and listening with maturity to their teachers and to each other. Their behaviour is good around the school and the majority work diligently in class. They acknowledge that in a few lessons a small number are not so attentive. The school has appropriate measures in place to deal with disruptions to lessons and to counsel and support students who find it difficult to apply themselves consistently to their work.

Excellent practitioners from a range of subject areas have embraced creativity as part of the school's specialist performing arts status. Teachers from the humanities and English departments in particular have worked closely with the drama and art departments to provide a more creative learning experience for the students. Consequently, elements of outstanding practice from these areas have successfully enriched the entire curriculum. Students report that the focus on developing more practical and creative approaches in lessons is making learning more enjoyable. It is also having a positive impact on their academic achievement as evidenced by the exceptionally perspicacious poetry of Key Stage 3 students, the reflective and mature writing of older students and the very high level of independent thinking evident in the work on display in many other departments. Students thrive and develop into articulate and mature young people who are well prepared for their future lives. In the words of another parent, 'the school has a wonderful ethos that is empowering the students'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use the skills and knowledge within the school to strengthen the rapidly developing cross-curricular links between the arts and other subjects.
- Extend the school's creative partnerships with local schools and other community groups so that they benefit from the school's expertise and so that curriculum opportunities continue to expand.

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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?	1
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	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
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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
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
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**

19 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Langtree School, Reading, RG8 0RA

Following my visit to your school, I would like to share my findings with you and thank you for your friendly welcome and for taking the time to talk to me. You tell me that this is a great school to go to and I agree with you. In fact I have judged that the school is an outstanding place to be educated in. You and your parents are very appreciative of the changes that are making this a much more pleasant site and you are enjoying the new styles of teaching that are making lessons more relevant. You are very keen on your school's specialist subjects, art, drama, music, and use the updated technologies most effectively to support learning in other subjects. You are particularly appreciative of the opportunities offered through the wide range of clubs.

The school looks after you exceptionally well. You say that you feel safe and that there is always someone to turn to if you need help. You speak highly of your teachers' readiness to assist you. Many of you make a positive difference to others through the school council, through your various duties, and through your involvement in local and international projects. Because of the hard work of your excellent headteacher, governors and committed teachers, you are all making extremely good progress in your learning and many of you are achieving highly. No wonder you say that you enjoy school and that those of you in Year 11 feel well prepared for leaving school and moving on. A few of you do not attend as regularly as you should. Please work with your parents and your teachers to improve this for you are missing out on new and exciting activities that will make it easier for you to find further educational and training opportunities.

Like your headteacher, the majority of you are putting learning first and your positive attitudes have helped Langtree to go from strength to strength. I am certain that you will continue to support your teachers' efforts in developing your personal and academic skills. I have asked your teachers to make sure that lessons in other subjects continue to make use of the methods that work so well in the performing arts. I have also asked the headteacher to ensure that the school continues to work with nearby schools, colleges and the local community to help them to benefit from the staff's skills and expertise and the exciting things on offer, and to ensure that you too enjoy an ever widening curriculum.

I wish you and the school a very successful future.

Yours faithfully

Catherine Munt

Her Majesty's Inspector