

Sir John Leman High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124817
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328220
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Ian Seath HMI

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1326
Sixth form	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Castleton
Headteacher	Mr Jeremy Rowe
Date of previous school inspection	11–12 January 2006
School address	Ringsfield Road Beccles Suffolk NR34 9PG
Telephone number	01502713223
Fax number	01502716646
Email address	reception@sjlhs.suffolk.sch.uk

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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 40 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and students as well as a representative from the local authority. They observed the school's operation, and looked at documentation as well as students' work. Questionnaire responses were received from 133 parents, and these were evaluated closely.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress made by students in class
- the consistency of provision between different subjects
- the extent to which the school has tackled issues identified at the last inspection
- the effectiveness of the sixth form
- the extent to which the school successfully challenges all students to achieve their best.

Information about the school

The school is a large one with a geographically wide and varied catchment area. It is well-regarded in the local community. The headteacher has been in post for only a few months and many aspects of the school are currently being reorganised with a number of new appointments. Students' prior attainment at entry in Year 9 is generally below that expected, with some signs of a declining trend. The school has a lower than average proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals, and a low proportion of ethnic minority heritage. The proportion with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just below the national average.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Sir John Leman High is a good school that is rightly well-regarded within the community which it serves. The school is demonstrating good capacity to improve because it has enabled students to make consistently good progress and the momentum of recent changes is beginning to show in improved performance and standards. Governors have recently changed their roles and the committee structure is now more closely matched to the needs of the school. Consequently, they can now play a more effective part in its improvement.

Good teaching and learning, together with a good curriculum and effective support care and guidance combine to ensure that students make good progress at Key Stage 4. However, there are aspects of the performance of the school which are too inconsistent between subject departments. This is a view shared by some parents. This variability has been correctly identified by the new headteacher as one of the main issues to be addressed, because it affects the achievement of individual students. Despite good progress, standards at GCSE have remained around national averages for the last three years.

Many students progress to the large sixth form, and most of these go on to university. However, the good progress seen in the lower school is not maintained because students are not well prepared for advanced level work. The school recognises that this can be improved by ensuring that teaching challenges students of all abilities so that they all reach consistently high standards. The school has taken action to improve the quality of teaching through professional development, identifying and sharing the very best teaching practice in the school. In addition, assessment and the monitoring of students' progress has improved. The school's self-evaluations are largely accurate and the improvement plan is realistic. The extent to which the school is sufficiently self-critical is improving, as is the use of performance data to set and monitor targets. Attendance and behaviour have both improved.

The school has a strong curriculum. Students benefit from outstanding partnership working, for example to ensure that transition from feeder schools is well managed and supported. The school's specialist technology status has enabled strong working relationships with other partners to enable the development of the North Suffolk Skills Centre. This has allowed a significant number of students to benefit from more

vocational provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that there is more consistency in the quality of teaching of different subjects by:
 - improved setting and monitoring of targets
 - continued identification and sharing of good practice.
- Improve GCSE attainment and the proportion of students attaining the highest grades by ensuring that teaching caters for the needs of all students by:
 - building on current assessment practice to ensure that students consistently know how to improve
 - improved lesson planning to ensure all students are suitably challenged in every class.
- Ensure that students entering the sixth form are better prepared for advanced level study so that they learn more effectively by:
 - developing the tutorial system so that study skills are effectively taught at an early stage
 - improving the consistency of provision between subjects
 - ensuring that provision caters well for all abilities.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

2

Students demonstrate good progress in most classes. This is supported by the consistently good progress at Key Stage 4 which is clear in the school's performance data. In the best classes students' learning is good because they consistently challenge both each other and the teacher. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress because of the good care they receive. There are no significant differences between the progress of boys and girls.

Students enter the school with prior attainment generally lower than average. They make good progress and attain results at GCSE close to the national average for five A* to C grades including English and mathematics, and four per cent higher for all A* to C grades. There is much variation in this picture however, with an unusually large range of abilities within the school. The new headteacher and his team rightly recognise that addressing the needs of this wide range in full is a school priority. There is also significant variation in the performance of individual subjects at GCSE. Some have a high proportion of students achieving the highest grades, others are well below the national average. Again, the headteacher and senior team recognise that this needs to be tackled through a more effective sharing of the best practice which undoubtedly exists within the school. Because of these variations, students are not always well prepared for the sixth form. Consequently, they demonstrate only satisfactory progress in Years 12 and 13, albeit with recent signs of improvement.

Students feel safe in and around the school. Behaviour is generally good, although there are occasional boisterous episodes in corridors. In classes attitudes are usually good with little disruption of learning. Students report that bullying is unusual, and that it is dealt with effectively. Attendance has improved and is now better than average, although the school is not content with this and is striving to improve it further. Students show good awareness of healthy lifestyles. Most students and parents have pride in their school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

The quality of the school's work

The majority of teaching is good and leads to good learning. This agrees with the school's own evaluation. Learning is often better in classes with a practical content, or when interesting and varied activities stimulate students well. However, lessons do not always ensure that all students, and in particular the least and most able, are challenged to achieve their best. Relationships between teachers and students are generally good, although a few parents raised concerns about discontinuity in staffing. The quality of homework is usually good, but there is too much variation in both the regularity with which homework is set and with its marking.

The school has worked hard in recent months to improve assessment and the way that it is used both in class and to monitor students' progress. Most students understand the level at which they are working, but their understanding of what they need to do to improve is more limited and there are significant differences between subjects. The curriculum is good with some outstanding features. It is well planned

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

and caters well for students' needs. Extra-curricular activities and opportunities are good and well attended. The school has jointly led an outstanding curriculum development to offer a range of specialist vocational provision in a nearby town. This has made vocational training opportunities available to a significant number of students who would not otherwise benefit. Similarly, specialist status has enabled the school to support access to modern computer-based technology equipment for its feeder middle schools. Careers guidance and advice is thorough and, as a result, most students leave school and progress either to employment or education. Transition support from feeder schools is excellent, however the support which students receive to progress into the sixth form is less well developed. Pastoral support is good with an extensive range of external support contacts and links.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management are good because they have consistently enabled students to make good progress. The school has tackled most of the issues identified at the last inspection. The new headteacher and senior leaders have quickly identified aspects of the school which need improvement and many changes are being made as a result. Very early indications are that these changes are beginning to have a beneficial effect on standards. The headteacher's vision for the improvement of the school is being communicated well to staff, who are increasingly clear about their role in improvement.

Much work is now being done to improve the consistency with which different curriculum areas operate. The school's own lesson observation system is accurate, but the extent to which it is used to identify whole-school developmental needs is underdeveloped and the extent to which it is used to judge standards in class could usefully be extended further, for example, by the monitoring of homework, teaching, learning, and assessment. The very recent introduction of departmental reviews, against which targets are set, is a sensible initiative to improve the precision with which performance is monitored. Self-assessments are realistic, though sometimes not sufficiently self-critical about teaching and learning. They are becoming a good tool for school improvement. The identification and sharing of good practice is improving.

The school meets requirements for safeguarding and race relations. Equality of opportunity is promoted well through the curriculum. The promotion of community cohesion is at an early stage of development. The international dimension is not well

developed and the auditing of the school's effectiveness in this area needs further work. The school's relationship with parents is generally strong and the extent to which views are sought is improving. Partnership working is excellent. The school has outstanding links with a wide range of outside agencies and support. In addition, governors help ensure that the school remains at the centre of the community that it serves. Work with partner and feeder schools and other educational providers is exemplary.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Inspectors observed good teaching and learning in the sixth form. Students benefit from a good curriculum. However, the overall effectiveness of the sixth form is only satisfactory because standards and progress are in line with national averages. The good progress noted in the lower school is not yet seen in the sixth form. This is because students enter with a very wide range of GCSE grades and many have not mastered the study skills necessary for more independent work. In addition, the tutorial system is not sufficiently well-developed to provide these skills at an early stage. Retention is satisfactory, however the proportion of students who attain the highest grades is below average and very variable between subjects. In common with national trends, pass rates are high. Having said this, a large majority of students who wish to progress to university do so, many to their first choice. Increasingly, the school is offering vocational provision for Years 12 and 13, but success rates in these areas have not been high. Senior managers recognise the need to raise standards in the sixth form, and this process has begun by the improvement of target setting and monitoring. Early indications are that this is beginning to lead to improved standards in AS courses but has not yet made a difference to A level results.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Many parents are very positive about the experiences of their children and spoke highly of the school. A small number of parents are concerned about bullying or the inconsistency of homework. A few raised issues around the extent to which their child was being effectively challenged to achieve their best. Slightly more, though still a minority, raised issues around the effectiveness of communications between school and home.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



27 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir John Leman High School, NR34 9PG

As you will know, I visited your school with four colleagues recently. We talked with many of you, sat in on your classes and met many of your teachers. Throughout this you were helpful and polite, and I would like to thank you for that.

Your school is a good one and it has begun to improve further with the appointment of the new headteacher and the many changes which he and his colleagues are beginning to make. The chances are that you will make good progress and will be successful.

We found out quite a few things about your school, and many of them you and your parents confirmed. We have asked the school to look at ways to ensure that all students in classes are challenged to achieve their best. A few of your parents were concerned about this. The school has made a start by starting to identify the best teaching practice and is holding special sessions to share these ideas. They have also begun work on assessment so that you will have a clearer idea what you need to do to improve.

One of the things you told us was that homework and the quality of marking is very variable, and we agreed. We have also asked the school to look at ways to make this more consistent. Many of you will progress to the sixth form, but some are not well prepared for this transition. The school agrees with this, and will be looking at ways to prepare you better for the more advanced work you will be doing.

You can also play your part in these improvements. Remember that it is in your interests to do so because it is your education. If you are not sure about how you are doing, and what you need to do to improve, you or your parents should ask. Attendance has improved a lot since the last inspection, and again you can help to keep it that way.

Finally, one of the things you told us is that bullying is rare. You can help keep it that way by talking to your tutor or another teacher if you are affected.

Once again, thank you

Yours faithfully

Ian Seath

Her Majesty's Inspector

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