

Stanborough School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117507
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	339021
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Christine Dick 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1080
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	175
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Matthew Buckley
Headteacher	Mr Peter Brown
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2007
School address	Lemsford Lane Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 40 lessons, and held meetings with staff, groups of students and the chair of governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at school records, policy documents and analysed the questionnaires from staff, students and the 86 they received from parents.

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

- the quality of teaching and the use of assessment in meeting the needs of all students
- the impact of recent changes to the curriculum on outcomes for students
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers in securing improvements.

Information about the school

Stanborough School is an average size school with mathematics and computing specialist status. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is rising but remains below the national figure. The number of students who have identified special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportion with a statement of special needs are below average. The school has a sixth form with courses provided by a consortium of local schools and other providers. It has received Healthy Schools and Investors in People awards. Compass, the school's inclusion unit, offers support for vulnerable students and those with identified learning needs.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Stanborough School is a satisfactory and improving school. The standards that students reach by the end of Year 11 are broadly average. There has been an upward shift in teachers' expectations, and while this has not yet been enough to ensure that all students make the best possible progress, standards have risen over the last four years on most measures including five or more GCSE grades A* to C with English and mathematics. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress against their learning targets, and in particular, in English and mathematics. The extent of student progress mirrors the quality of the teaching they receive. While teaching overall is satisfactory, there is an increasing proportion of good and outstanding teaching in the school but this is not consistently the case across all subjects. Not all teachers plan well enough to meet the different needs of students in mixed ability classes or check, as a matter of routine, what students have learnt as their lessons progress. Nevertheless, a determined drive by senior leaders has resulted in improving GCSE outcomes in the four years to 2009. School data for 2009 shows a sharp rise in GCSE point scores and a trend of continuing improvement.

Students develop good personal skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They understand how to remain safe in challenging circumstances and how to lead healthy lifestyles. Behaviour seen during the inspection was good in lessons and around the school site but a minority of the students and parents surveyed expressed some concern about the behaviour of a few, especially with regard to low-level disruption. The school has responded promptly to address the few reported incidents of bullying. Students make a good contribution to the school and the wider community, for example, through charity work and sporting events. The school's overall contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory.

The quality of care, guidance and support that students receive is good. Compass, the school's inclusion unit, provides a safe and structured education for students who find school difficult to access and is successful in the integration of reluctant and vulnerable young people back into the main school. In addition, it provides an effective study support programme for individual Key Stage 4 students with specific learning needs. Safeguarding arrangements are good and aspects of this work are outstanding. For example, the rigorous approach to maintaining the single central record is a model of excellent practice. Students receive good guidance on curriculum choices and are supported well through house and year groups. Nevertheless, the school's leaders have recognised that not enough is always done to improve the progress made by students. As a consequence, a more robust system has been put in place to focus on target examination grades. The progress students are making towards their targets is recorded

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regularly but there are inconsistencies in the way different subjects gather and use assessment data. Attendance is good and improving. A strong focus on the links between attendance and outcomes for students is communicated well and has led to further improvements since the last inspection. Leaders' evaluation of the school's performance is broadly accurate, and the pattern of improvement in outcomes for students since the last inspection shows Stanborough's good capacity to bring about further improvement. The impact of the school's specialism across the curriculum is very evident in information and communication technology (ICT) but less so in mathematics. The quality of education provided in the sixth form is good and improving. Sixth Form students make good progress. School data indicates further improvements at AS and A-level in 2009.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress of all groups by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan lessons more precisely in order to meet the differing needs of students, particularly in mixed ability classes
 - using assessment more consistently across all subjects to focus on the progress students make in lessons
 - ensuring that the good practice in supporting students and matching work to ability established in the special educational needs department in core subjects is adopted and developed in other subjects.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The large majority of students learn successfully and make satisfactory progress given average starting points. Their attainment, based on the percentage of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE, has risen steadily over the last four years and is now at the national average, from a low baseline in 2006. A higher proportion of students now attain at least five A* to C grades. GCSE module and examination results for 2009 show the trend of improvement is set to continue. Because they benefit from good support, students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make especially good progress in relation to their challenging targets in GCSE English and mathematics but this is not consistent across all subjects. Exemplary development of individual education plans in core subjects provides teachers with a very good understanding of these students' needs.

In the large majority of lessons observed by inspectors, students made at least satisfactory progress and their behaviour was good. Students' relationships with teaching staff are positive and this fosters good attitudes to learning. In the best lessons, careful matching of the work to individual needs and a variety of tasks ensure

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good progress. Where learning is slowed, it is usually because too much time is spent on some activities or questioning does not sufficiently promote or extend learning.

Students feel safe and secure in school. They benefit from the good opportunities they have to contribute to the school and the wider community. For example, through the leadership of local sports events for primary schools and work for local charities. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and these are promoted well through personal social and health education and citizenship. The standards that students reach offer satisfactory preparation for their future working life. These skills are further enhanced by whole school enterprise events, work experience and the productive way in which students work together in groups in many lessons and by their good and improving attendance.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Nevertheless, there is an increasing proportion of good and outstanding teaching and some common features in all classrooms that help to promote good learning. Working relationships between teachers

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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and students are good, and teachers work hard to develop students' confidence. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. In many lessons, students are encouraged to explain what they have learnt and this helps them to take some responsibility for the progress they make. There is some excellent practice in the way the best teachers plan their lessons to ensure that students of different abilities make good progress but this practice is not spread through the whole school. Teaching assistants make a good contribution in lessons to supporting the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Marking is undertaken regularly. The best practice is encouraging and helpful to students by detailing the next steps they need to take to improve further. Where teaching is satisfactory, rather than good, teachers are not clear enough about what they expect students of different abilities to learn and attain. In these lessons, students usually make satisfactory progress, but they are not always challenged sufficiently to bring out the best in them because the work is not matched precisely enough to meet their differing learning needs.

There are sound procedures for tracking pupils' progress over time, and appropriate strategies to intervene where students are in danger of underachieving. Where there is good practice in the use of assessment to plan lessons, this has had a clear and positive impact. For example in science, where standards have risen since the last inspection. The good use of ICT to support learning is well established. Teachers are confident in interactive whiteboard techniques to stimulate learning and sustain students' interest and motivation.

The school has established a broad and balanced curriculum which has improved since the last inspection and that matches the different abilities and aspirations of its students well. Recently introduced opportunities enable younger students to take examinations early. Students start their GCSE courses in Year 9 and are able to take GCSE examinations at the end of Year 10. Linked to the school's specialism, all students take an ICT subject and many of them achieve good results in ICT examinations. The curriculum is further enhanced by opportunities to participate in extra-curricular sporting activity, drama, music and school trips. Links with external partners enable some students to follow vocational courses outside school. The curriculum helps to ensure that students make at least satisfactory progress and supports their good personal development.

The induction of students into Year 7 is managed well. The students who commented upon this did so favourably and it is clear that most Year 7 students have settled into the school quickly. As one parent said, 'Since she started at Stanborough, my daughter has enjoyed and looked forward to school. She is flourishing and maturing both academically and socially. I am very pleased with the school.' The support for vulnerable students is good. Robust and effective systems are in place to engage external partners in the support of vulnerable students when needs are identified through regular reviews. There is a clear system for referrals and follow-up which is understood by all staff. The attendance, achievement and well-being of looked after children are monitored rigorously.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

There is a clear direction and drive from the senior leadership team which has led to improved outcomes for students at all levels and to securing the continuation of further improvements. Self-evaluation, development planning and monitoring of performance by senior managers are rigorous, but consistency across departments is more variable. This is particularly the case in relation to the understanding and use of data to inform planning for further improvement. The governing body is well led, supportive and fully involved in reviewing the work of the school. An increased focus on the monitoring of teaching by senior managers means that they have a good grasp of the strengths and the weaknesses that need to be addressed and action taken is bringing about improvements. An inclusive ethos permeates the school and equality of opportunity is promoted well. Students from different cultures mix comfortably and there are very few racist incidents. The school's wider contribution to community cohesion is satisfactory. An action plan is in place which shows evidence of consideration of the context and needs of the school. Criteria have been identified to measure the impact of actions taken but no evaluation has taken place. Safeguarding procedures in relation to recruitment and child protection are good and are a significant strength of the school. While overall engagement with parents is satisfactory, proposals are in place to further improve communication links between parents and the school. Resources are used well, both within the school and through partnerships, to increase the range of curriculum options and to strengthen the care and support for students. Financial management is good. In terms of outcomes for students, the school currently provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The vast majority of sixth form students meet the challenging targets set for them. They make good progress and reach above average standards. In 2009, examination results showed a good improvement on 2008 outcomes. Determined efforts to improve the quality of provision have led to a clear trend of rising standards. Progress in the lessons observed during the inspection was good because much of the teaching and learning was of a good or better standard. Students have an exceptionally wide range of choice at A level which is significantly enhanced through consortium arrangements with local schools. Enrichment opportunities are very good and include compulsory physical education and sports. Sixth form students are confident and articulate and they develop good personal and social skills. They make a good contribution to the school community in a variety of ways; for example, by supporting younger students to develop their reading skills further and leading extra-curricular activity.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Returns of parental questionnaires were relatively low but overall parents and carers are very supportive of the school. None had concerns about the safety of their child. A small minority of parents say that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour but this was not consistent with evidence gathered during the inspection. The response to all questions from the large majority of parents was to approve of the way the school carried out its work. Inspectors views are largely in accordance with those of parents except for the quality of teaching and the progress which students make in their work, both of which inspectors judged to be satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stanborough School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 86 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1080 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	35	54	63	1	1	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	22	26	63	73	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	27	31	56	65	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	30	54	63	5	6	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	15	17	67	76	3	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	18	21	61	71	5	6	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	15	17	62	71	9	10	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	17	20	66	77	2	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	28	52	60	9	10	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	20	61	72	6	7	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	12	65	76	8	9	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	24	28	57	66	5	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	31	36	52	60	2	2	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



6 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Stanborough School, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6YR

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school this week, I would like to thank you for the way you helped us with the inspection. We appreciated your honesty and the mature responses you gave to our questions.

We spoke to a good number of you and found you to be polite and articulate. About 130 of you completed our questionnaire. Most of you say that you enjoy school, that you learn a lot and that you are helped to be safe and to understand how to lead a healthy life. Your attendance is good. Some of you feel that behaviour is not as good as it should be in some lessons. Inspectors found little evidence of this during the inspection but suggest you share any particular concerns you may have with your teachers. Your school cares for you well and any reported incidents are usually followed up quickly.

Stanborough is a satisfactory and improving school. We were impressed by the new curriculum. It is good because it provides good opportunities for those of you with different abilities to do well. The grades you attain in GCSE examinations are getting better and those of you who need help with your learning are making good progress. Nevertheless, we are advising your school to help you make more progress by ensuring that the good ideas that your teachers have are shared more widely, so that all of you benefit. We have particularly asked them to focus on assessing your learning in lessons so that their teaching can be better matched to your needs.

It is good to note how many of you are choosing to stay on in school after Year 11. Those of you in the sixth form make good progress and have access to a wide range of courses in school and through the consortium.

With all good wishes for your success in the future

Yours sincerely

Christine Dick

Her Majesty's Inspector

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