

St Laurence School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126472
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	340984
Inspection dates	20–21 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Karl Sampson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
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	1264
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Cliff Stevens
Headteacher	Mr James Colquhoun
Date of previous school inspection	0 January 2007
School address	Ashley Road Bradford-on-Avon Wiltshire BA15 1DZ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The majority of time was spent looking at learning. Inspectors visited 32 lessons, observed 31 teachers and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, policy documents and students' work. They also scrutinised 264 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, and questionnaires completed by staff and a sample of students.

An Ofsted administrative error resulted in the omission of one question in the parental questionnaire. Whilst this has not affected the overall outcome of the inspection it does mean that the parental response on the question '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)' is not recorded in the report.

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

- how effectively teaching and the curriculum meet the needs of all groups of students, including the more vulnerable
- the contribution of performing arts status to school improvement
- the effectiveness and impact of the monitoring and evaluation carried out by senior and middle leaders on student outcomes
- how effectively sixth form provision meets the needs of all learners.

Information about the school

St Laurence School is larger than average and serves the market town of Bradford-on-Avon and the surrounding area. Most students are of White British heritage and the very large majority speak English as their first language. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is less than half the national average. These include students who have cognition and learning difficulties or who have social, emotional and behavioural issues. The proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs is slightly below the national average. The school has held performing arts specialist status since 2000.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

There have been a range of important improvements at St Laurence in the three years since the school was last inspected. It is now a good and rapidly improving school. The school has significantly improved every major aspect of its work since the last inspection, leading to better outcomes for students. Consequently, there is a rising trend in students' attainment and all students make good progress in their learning regardless of their background, starting points or special educational needs. Much has been achieved and the school is in a strong position to continue and accelerate this improvement because:

- it is well led by a headteacher who has a clear vision for the school's future
- self-evaluation is strong at all levels and is based securely on the clear interpretation of a range of data and the accurate appraisal of the quality of provision
- school development planning and successful interventions to support learning are firmly based on the findings of this rigorous self-evaluation
- comprehensive systems are in place to support the development of teaching and non-teaching staff, especially for aspirant and practising school leaders at all levels
- there is an excellent ethos of teamwork and collaboration amongst staff, who are now successfully engaged in raising standards and improving achievement for all.

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now successfully engaged in raising standards and improving achievement for all. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and improving because of the astute monitoring by school leaders and a sharp focus on improving classroom practice. There are some outstanding lessons which are characterised by creative and imaginative teaching methods, underpinned by challenging activities and regular, precise oral and written feedback which enables students to reflect on their learning and progress and know exactly how to improve their work in each subject. However, this excellent practice is not yet embedded consistently across the school. Greater flexibility in curricular choice has ensured that the curriculum now matches the needs and interests of students more closely. Students appreciate these changes and say how much they enjoy the range of courses available. These changes have clearly had a positive impact on students' overall achievement, but the school leaders have not yet applied their rigorous monitoring procedures to evaluate the impact on outcomes for different groups of students, to ensure maximum benefit for all.

The school has a pleasant and positive atmosphere. Students are polite, friendly and behave well. They talk eloquently and enthusiastically about how well the school supports their personal and academic development and enables them to make an outstanding contribution across the school and in the wider community. There are many opportunities for students to get involved and take a lead in a huge range of activities, many emanating from the introduction of the school's new house system. Students speak proudly of the school's performing arts status and recognise the opportunities it offers through curricular development, enrichment activities and community involvement. As a result, students in this very caring and supportive school are thriving both academically and personally. Attendance is high and continues to rise. One parent summarised the views of many as follows: 'The quality of the teaching together with the range of varied extra-curricular activities (especially performing arts and sports) make the school a stimulating place to learn.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build upon the best practice in the school so that all teaching is good or better by January 2011 and the proportion of outstanding lessons is increased to at least 40% by January 2012. It should improve further its teaching by:
 - planning learning experiences which provide high levels of challenge for all students in all lessons
 - extending the use of effective questioning and dialogue, so that students are given greater opportunity to reflect deeply on their learning and progress
 - ensuring consistency in the use of day-to-day assessment so that all students understand the subject-specific actions that they must take to improve their work.
- Rigorously evaluate curricular developments to ensure that they fully meet the needs of all students.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In the vast majority of lessons observed, students made good progress and achieved well. Students enjoy their learning and engage enthusiastically with a wide range of activities in lessons. This is most evident when work is carefully planned to match their ability levels and students are encouraged to hone their analytical skills.

Progress is accelerating as the quality of teaching improves and the curriculum meets students' needs and interests more closely. The greatest gains in learning were observed in those lessons which actively involved students and encouraged them to be creative and imaginative in their learning.

GCSE examination results are consistently above average in most subjects, and the standards seen in lessons and students' books were at a similar level. The school's latest analysis of performance for 2010 suggests that students are on track to achieve their challenging targets by the end of this academic year.

In the past the progress made by a small minority of lower attaining students has not matched that of their peers. However, improvements in the curriculum and a sharply focused intervention programme are helping to even out the gap in achievement between this group of students and the rest of the school.

Outcomes in the specialist performing arts subjects are good. The specialism makes a significant contribution to helping students gain good life skills that prepare them for education, training and employment. The inspection team was particularly impressed by the quality of students' speaking and listening skills.

Students behave well in lessons and around the school. Where teaching was good, students' behaviour made a stronger contribution to learning. In the most engaging lessons, behaviour was outstanding.

Students feel very safe in school. They say that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively. This view was echoed by the parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire.

Opportunities for students to contribute to the school and wider community are extensive and diverse. They include an impressive range of activities across the performing arts with local organisations such as the Wiltshire Music Centre and the Egg Theatre.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The way in which the school cares for and supports students is an important strength. The introduction of a house system, with students from different year groups mixed together in the same tutor group, has made a significant contribution to improvement in this area.

Despite the school's size, everyone is known as an individual. Excellent links with a range of outside agencies complement a coherent, integrated approach to ensure that

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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support is tailored to individual need. Consequently, all students, including those who are more vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, receive comprehensive and well-targeted support, guidance and care.

The curriculum is developing well and is now more flexible for all students. Performing arts status has been used effectively to support the recent introduction of a personal learning and thinking skills programme (PLaTS) across the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

At Key Stage 4 the school's partnership work with other local providers has improved the number of vocational and applied opportunities available. This has enabled students to select a combination of courses that meets their needs much more closely. Key Stage 4 students that inspectors spoke to were very positive about their choice of courses.

The range of extra-curricular activities on offer through the '3-2-5' programme is extremely impressive. These opportunities are popular with students and participation rates are high.

The school accurately evaluates the quality of teaching as good. The large majority of lessons observed were good or better and no inadequate lessons were seen during the inspection. At its best, teaching is inspiring. Inspectors saw some superb learning, where lesson activities were creative, imaginative and designed to challenge and interest every student, regardless of ability.

Less effective lessons typically have the following characteristics:

- a tendency for teachers to over-direct proceedings, and too few opportunities for students to really engage with their work or develop their ideas
- a lack of variety in learning activities, resulting in activities that do not match the needs of all students so that not everyone is fully challenged
- a lack of effective questioning and dialogue, with insufficient opportunities for students to reflect upon their learning and progress.

In lessons where these features were apparent, progress was at best satisfactory.

Marking and assessment have improved since the last inspection. Where they are good, teachers provide precise subject-specific guidance which clearly identifies what students need to do to improve their work. In other cases, guidance is of limited value and simply confirms that students have completed work, corrects what they have written, or provides general comments.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

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The headteacher, ably supported by a strong leadership team, has shown exceptional clarity in outlining his vision of success and driving improvement across all areas of the school since the last inspection. Leaders at all levels share the same vision for improvement, focusing on improving provision through raising the quality of teaching and learning. Thorough self-evaluation draws on a wide range of information to focus on key areas for improvement, leading to increasing accountability and good outcomes for all students.

The school promotes equality of opportunity strongly through effective policies and procedures to ensure that outcomes and experiences for all students are positive. Monitoring and evaluation are very well developed and are used to good effect. This is exemplified by the school's work to successfully tackle the underperformance of a small group of lower attaining students. Already there are clear signs of accelerated progress for this group of students thanks to the changes in provision made by the school. The same approach has not yet been fully applied to evaluating the latest changes to the curriculum.

Outstanding partnerships with a range of outside organisations are used very successfully to support students' learning and well-being. As part of the high-quality care the school takes of the students, effective procedures are in place to ensure their safety and all current safeguarding and legal requirements are met.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is good. The school has a strong and well-established programme of international links and engages strongly with the local community through the local extended services network and its performing arts outreach work. Students' understanding of life in other communities across Britain is not as well developed.

Governors play a good supporting role in the school's development. They have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and hold leaders to account when they need to. Governors ensure that the school provides good value for money, with standards rising, provision improving and good outcomes for all students.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2

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The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form continues to build upon the work of the main school to further raise the achievement of all students. Students' learning and progress are good and improving and there are clear indications of strong capacity for sustained improvement in the future.

A newly appointed director of sixth form has been an important factor in strengthening systems for monitoring student and subject performance. Underperformance in a small number of subjects is being tackled successfully and consequently after a slight dip in 2008, attainment is rising.

Teaching and assessment are good overall. The school is presently focused on strategies to raise achievement further, including reviewing the monitoring of teaching and the curriculum to ensure that sufficient challenge is provided for all students, regardless of ability.

Care, guidance and support are good and students value the good range of support available. As a result, students attend regularly and are extremely positive about the education they receive. Retention rates from Year 11 are high and very few students leave at the end of Year 12. Students are well advised about higher education, training and employment options. Most progress to higher education, some securing Oxbridge places, and they have high expectations for the future.

Sixth formers are good role models for younger students and make a positive contribution in their work with the school and the local community.

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

Of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, a very large majority showed that they were highly satisfied with the quality of education and care the school provides. Those who wrote positive comments referred to the school as 'supportive' and

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'well-led' and praised the extra-curricular activities. This is reflected in the extremely positive responses to questions 1, 2, 3, 12 and 13. Parents of the new Year 7 were particularly pleased with how happy and enthusiastic their children are about school. A few parents raised concerns about the effectiveness with which the school communicates information, or takes account of their suggestions or concerns. Inspectors recognise that any lapse in communication is a concern for those involved but consider that the school works hard to communicate with parents and act upon their views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Laurence 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 264 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,264 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	95	36	154	58	8	3	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	127	48	130	49	4	2	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	91	35	157	60	11	4	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	90	34	145	55	23	9	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	64	24	172	65	16	6	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	60	23	160	61	28	11	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	49	19	181	69	25	10	1	1
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)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	77	29	157	60	21	8	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	66	25	161	61	22	8	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	49	19	163	62	28	11	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	103	39	137	52	9	3	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	115	44	131	50	13	5	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.



22 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of St Laurence School, Bradford-on-Avon, BA15 1DZ

Thank you all for welcoming us into your school during the recent two-day inspection. My team and I enjoyed meeting you and finding out about how well the school is meeting your needs and caring for you. It is our judgement that your school has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now providing you with a good education. Your school has excellent capacity to improve further.

The school has worked really hard since the last inspection to improve your achievement. Your headteacher leads the school exceptionally well, and is ably supported by other staff and the governors. They are all determined that you should have the opportunity to succeed and their work enables you to achieve good outcomes overall. You told us how much you appreciated the work of your teachers.

You enjoy coming to school, are very well cared for, have a good range of curricular opportunities and are well taught. You particularly appreciate the positive benefits that performing arts status has brought as well as the impressive range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. You told us you feel safe, and we think your behaviour in and around the school is good. You are polite, friendly and speak eloquently and enthusiastically about your school. You make an outstandingly positive contribution to the life of the school and the wider community.

We have asked your headteacher to improve the school in a number of ways. He was already aware of their importance and we were able to agree them very easily.

- Work closely with the teachers to make lessons even better by:
- ensuring all teachers provide you with challenging learning activities which engage you more actively in learning
- ensuring that all teachers consistently give you better verbal and written feedback on your work and allow more time for you to reflect on your learning and progress in lessons so that you always know how to improve.
- Monitor and review the changes to the curriculum to ensure that it meets all your individual needs as well as possible.

You can certainly help the teachers with some of these things. Thank you once again for your help and very best wishes for your future happiness and success.

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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