

Sexey's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123902
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	343785
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Ken Bush

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.
The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	546
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Neville Hartnell
Headteacher	Mr Raymond McGovern
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2007
School address	Cole Road Bruton Somerset BA10 0DF
Telephone number	01749 813393
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Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2010
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Boarding provision**Social care Unique Reference Number**

SC039847

Social care inspectorHeather Chaplin

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Introduction

This inspection of the main school was carried out by four additional inspectors.

The inspectors visited 24 lessons and held meetings with staff, governors and students. They observed the school's work, and looked at school policies, development plans and 53 parental questionnaires. The inspection of boarding provision was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and an additional inspector.

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

- attainment and progress in all year groups
- the quality of teaching and assessment
- the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures
- the quality of boarding provision
- the quality of provision in the sixth form and the outcomes for students.

Information about the school

Sexey's is a small Church of England boarding school situated in a largely rural context. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals and the proportion of students identified by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities are both well below the national average. Most students are of White British origin. The school has had specialist humanities college status since 2008. Courses for 14 to 16-year-old students are offered in partnership with a local further education college. Over half of the students in the 11 to 16 population are boarders, and around a third of the sixth form.

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****2**

Main findings

The school provides its students with a good and improving standard of education. Since the previous inspection, there has been significant restructuring of the senior leadership team resulting in a renewed focus on the quality of learning. This has led to rapid progress in some areas of the school, notably in the sixth form, which is now outstanding and providing a model for improvement in the main school. A clear strength of the school is the quality and accuracy of its self-evaluation procedures, which involve a wide range of stakeholders. These procedures mean that school leaders and governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and have a robust plan in place to address areas in need of improvement. This detailed and relevant improvement plan, the track record of consistently strong achievement over time and the growing impact of specialist humanities status indicate good capacity for sustained improvement.

Although the overall attainment of students who completed Key Stage 4 in 2009 was not as good as in the two previous years, attainment is, nevertheless, consistently high and achievement outstanding. Moreover, inspection evidence indicates that the progress of current students towards their challenging targets is good. The progress of different groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is also consistently good. Attendance is well above the national average, reflecting the extremely high regard that most students have for their school and their enjoyment of learning. Students' acquisition and application of work-related skills, such as literacy and information and communication technology (ICT), are exceptional and make a strong contribution to their excellent personal development and mature outlook. The school provides a safe environment in which most students, including the most vulnerable, feel secure. They report that incidents of bullying do occur occasionally but that in almost all cases, staff deal with them effectively.

The standard of teaching overall is good and has improved since the previous inspection. However, students are not always sufficiently encouraged to learn independently by curriculum leaders and their teams. Progress also slows in those few lessons in which planning fails to take account of students' different starting points and capabilities. During the inspection, some excellent practice was seen which senior leaders have begun to share between curriculum teams more systematically. Marking is good overall but is inconsistent across the school and consequently, students do not always get enough good quality written feedback to guide them in how to improve their work and reach higher levels of achievement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Develop the capacity of all curriculum leaders and their teams to improve students' achievement through promoting more opportunities for independent and active learning in lessons.
- Improve the impact of assessment by ensuring that:
 - there is consistency across subjects and key stages in the quality of feedback given to students so that they can improve their work more effectively
 - information about students' progress is used consistently well so that tasks are matched more precisely to individuals' different needs and starting points.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

In the large majority of lessons seen in the inspection, students were well behaved, attentive and keen to do their best. They enjoy good relationships both with their peers and their teachers, and appreciate the efforts staff make to provide innovative and interesting activities. In a Year 9 English lesson, for example, students were invited in groups to explore imaginatively the connections between Romeo and Juliet and James Bond movies, producing, as a result, both a depth of understanding and an originality of personal response.

Attainment is high in most subjects offered in Key Stage 4 and, in some, very high. In 2009, every student who completed the GCSE art course gained an A* to C grade and there were also very high pass rates in design and technology. An increasing proportion of students are now gaining A and A* grades, reflecting the school's successful implementation of the gifted and talented programme. High attainment and outstanding progress in English and history highlight the increasing impact of the humanities specialism. Achievement overall is good with no significant differences over time between the progress made by boys and girls.

Students show excellent knowledge and understanding of healthy lifestyles and a strong interest in maintaining a sensible diet. They take an active part in the very wide range of physical activities available. Students make a positive and increasing contribution to the school and the local community, including through the links established by the specialist subjects. The church plays an increasingly important part in the life of the school and is at the heart of its strong, caring ethos. This, along with the school's commitment to encouraging tolerance and personal responsibility, contributes strongly to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	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 school is strongly committed to high quality teaching and learning. Teachers routinely display good subject knowledge which provides a solid platform for pupils' good progress. In most lessons, teachers employ a variety of strategies to enthuse and motivate students with peer assessment and collaborative work as common features. However, in a small minority of lessons, there is too much direction from the teacher, rendering students too passive in their learning. In a similar way, while most lessons are well planned with good progression between different activities, there are a few where students' different capabilities, interests and prior learning are not taken into account sufficiently well.

The good curriculum provides well-organised opportunities for effective learning through a broad range of experiences. A large majority of students enjoy their education because they are well served by the curriculum which encourages both their academic and personal development. There is good provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT. The school's commitment to developing in students a deeper understanding of learning is evident in the Year 7 'learning to learn' initiative, although this work has not been fully extended into other year groups. A rich and varied programme of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum for students of all ages, interests and abilities, and this leads to high levels of motivation and the development of good teamwork. Vocational courses, including Diplomas, have been successfully introduced in Key Stage 4 in partnership with a local college. These meet the needs of the relatively few students who do not choose to follow a traditional academic route.

The school provides a strong network of support, a view endorsed both by the students

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and the majority of parents and carers. Students feel safe, valued and included. Most appreciate the recently introduced vertical tutor group system. As one said, 'It really helps to support the younger students because the older ones have more experience.' Tutor-time activities in general, however, are insufficiently developed. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good, with the consistently effective deployment of teaching assistants.

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	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and managers have successfully focused on developing a cohesive, learning community at Sexey's. Accurate identification of the school's strengths and areas for development has led to an excellent strategic plan, establishing clear, ambitious, yet achievable development goals. The school's good approach to setting challenging, but realistic, targets is making a significant contribution to raising students' aspirations and maintaining outstanding achievement. In a relatively short period of time, the school's humanities specialism, which is very well led, has begun to make an impressive contribution to school improvement and community development, not least by forging strong and effective partnerships with other providers and educational organisations. The role of middle leaders in quality assurance and the promotion of best practice, particularly in teaching, is not yet firmly embedded.

Equality of opportunity is vigorously and successfully promoted and there is ample inspection evidence to demonstrate that the school is welcoming and inclusive. Procedures for ensuring the effectiveness of safeguarding are well established and clearly understood by students, staff and governors with clear arrangements in place for monitoring policies and practices. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good and leaders and managers have a clear understanding of what is needed to develop it further. This is adding to the school's capacity to secure further, sustained improvement. Governors discharge their responsibilities well and ensure that school leaders are well supported and effectively challenged.

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

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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	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form has improved markedly since the previous inspection and is now outstanding overall. As a result of determined and highly effective leadership, attainment in 2009 at both A and AS levels was exceptionally high with most subjects offered performing significantly above the national averages. Progress, too, in many subjects was outstanding. A further major contributory factor in the academic success of the sixth form is its highly committed and strongly focused pastoral team which makes excellent use of a robust and sophisticated system to track students' progress.

Teaching is consistently good overall, although, as in the main school, a few lessons miss the opportunity to give students enough scope to develop their learning individually. When students are able to work independently, as in a Year 13 drama lesson seen during the inspection where students were preparing for an assessment, the quality of their responsiveness, maturity and collaborative learning can be stunning. The curriculum serves the needs and interests of the students well and is clearly enabling the vast majority of learners to experience high levels of academic success. The enrichment curriculum prepares students for higher education and adult life effectively.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Boarding provision

- The quality of health care is outstanding. There is an excellent programme of

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personal, health and social education. Staff are fully aware of students' health needs, and communicate effectively through clear, concise records.

- Students may talk over any worries with a wide range of professionals, including a qualified counsellor. Qualified nurses provide a high standard of medical and pastoral care, with access to specialist medical advice when necessary. Medicines are handled and recorded safely. There is a well-equipped six-bedded sick bay where students can be cared for when unwell.
- School food is well-balanced, attractively presented and varied to meet students' dietary needs. There is access to snacks and to drinking water outside main meal times. Laundry is managed effectively.
- Provision for keeping students safe is generally good. Where shortfalls have occurred in the past, the outcomes for children have not been significantly affected. The school implements a sound anti-bullying policy through a system of restorative justice. Students show good standards of behaviour.
- Staff are well-trained in child protection. The school has improved safeguarding policy and practice in response to a complex historical incident.
- Students are kept safe from fire risks, but two instances were found where individual boarding houses had not complied with school policy.
- There is a robust staff recruitment process in place, and all the required checks on prospective staff are completed. Site security is generally good, and the site is monitored by CCTV. Risk assessments for activities and for the premises are very well recorded. There are unrestricted windows on the upper floors of the boarding houses, and this is currently being addressed.
- Boarders have access to an exceptional range of activities and opportunities in the evenings and at weekends. They have good provision for study in various suitable locations around the school, which also provides a stimulating environment for sports, recreation and other activities. There is a good variety of indoor pursuits on offer.
- Students participate fully in the wider community, as well as in school life through the prefect system and participating in the school council. There are established ways in which they can contribute their views, and some significant changes have taken place in response to their suggestions.
- It is easy for boarders to maintain contact with their parents. Any new boarders are carefully introduced to the school and supported until they have settled in. The specialised junior boarding house is an important part of this process, and meets the needs of younger students very well.
- Relationships between staff and boarders are polite, respectful and generally warm. Boarders praised houseparents for their care and support, and some recently appointed houseparents have been very positively received.
- Boarders have access to safe storage for personal items. Generally, boarding accommodation is of a good standard, with a rolling programme of refurbishment and repair taking place. Dormitories are homely and attractive, and many are personalised. Some beds show signs of minor damage; some mattresses are

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described as uncomfortable and common room furniture in some houses is not of a homely character.

- Toilet and washing facilities are generally good. However, in Cliff House, there are sufficient toilets overall, but only two on one landing occupied by up to 18 boys. . The toilet and shower provision for girls in this house, and for both genders in the other houses, is significantly better.
- Boarders cannot access their houses during the day, and use two shower blocks for changing. One of these has been refurbished to a good standard. The other block contains communal showers that do not provide sufficient privacy, and the tiled walls were not clean at the time of the inspection.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Students confirm that their cultural and identity needs are well met. Disabled students' needs have been professionally assessed and they are provided with an impressive programme of individual support.
- The leadership of boarding is effectively managed. There is a clear structure through the head of boarding to the headteacher. The board of governors support boarding very well. Some governors visit the boarding houses regularly and listen to boarders' views.
- There are systems in place for monitoring boarding records and risk assessments, but this is not yet sufficiently embedded. Actions recorded on one monitoring visit may be followed up, but recording does not make this clear.
- Boarding houses are well-staffed, and staff receive a thorough induction. There is a good level of supervision in the houses, but some sixth form students are using indoor sports facilities without a member of staff present. The school undertook to manage these activities to ensure that any such use is supervised as necessary.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

- Ensure that any future child protection concerns are referred promptly to Social Services in line with the South West Child Protection procedures (breach of national minimum standard 3.7).
- Ensure that fire drills are always carried out at intervals specified by the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service, and that fire doors are not wedged open (breach of national minimum standard 26).
- Ensure that windows above the ground floor that present a risk to safety are fitted with suitable opening restrictors or alternative safety measures (breach of national minimum standard 47.3).
- Continue to improve the quality of beds and mattresses and furniture in the boarding houses (breach of national minimum standard 42.2)
- Increase the number of toilets available to boys in Cliff House (NMS 44.2).
- Fit curtains around the changing room showers; ensure that the showers are clean and that they are kept locked when not in use (breach of national minimum standard 45.3).
- Ensure that any actions identified in monitoring reports and risk assessments are followed up in the next monitoring visit report (NMS 23).

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- Ensure that sixth form students have appropriate supervision when using the sports hall and weights room (NMS 31).

This is the grade for the boarding provision

The effectiveness of the boarding provision
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2

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers are very supportive of the work of the school and appreciate the efforts made by the headteacher and other staff to bring about improvements. Many commented favourably on the school's ethos of high expectations and the challenge and support given to the most able to realise their ambitions, especially in the sixth form. There was significant praise, too, for the school as a caring and nurturing community in which all children are well known personally to the majority of staff. A few parents and carers raised concerns about what they perceived to be declining standards of behaviour in lessons and inconsistent behaviour management by staff. Inspectors found that, while there were a very few instances of mildly inconsiderate conduct, behaviour overall is good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Sexey's 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 53 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 546 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	57	20	38	3	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	29	55	21	40	0	0	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	38	26	49	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	36	29	55	3	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	12	23	38	72	3	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	23	21	40	14	26	3	6
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	42	26	49	3	6	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)	15	28	26	49	8	15	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	40	28	53	2	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	28	30	57	4	8	6	11
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	23	27	51	9	17	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	25	47	20	38	4	8	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	55	19	36	4	8	0	0

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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.



11 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Sexey's School, Bruton, BA10 0DF

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting you, and were impressed with the pride most of you have in your school.

These are the main findings of the inspection:

- Sexey's is a good and improving school with an outstanding sixth form.
- Most of you are reaching high levels of attainment and making good progress; in the sixth form, your progress is outstanding.
- Teaching and the curriculum are both good.
- Your personal development is good overall and in some areas, such as your awareness of healthy lifestyles, it is outstanding.
- Staff at the school care for, guide and support you well so that you can be safe and successful at school and well prepared for adult life.
- Your school is well led and managed, with very good plans for how it can get even better.
- The school's humanities status makes a strong and growing contribution to your education.

The headteacher agrees with the inspection team that you could achieve even better and we have asked that:

- teachers make sure your lessons are well suited to everyone's abilities and interests
- marking becomes consistently good in all subjects so that you are clear about what you need to do to improve your work.

On behalf of the inspection team, the very best of luck with your studies in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ken Bush

Lead Inspector

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