



# Sandringham School

Inspection report

**Better  
education  
and care**

Unique Reference Number 9194197  
 LEA Hertfordshire

Inspection number 280114  
 Inspection dates 12 - 13 October, 2005  
 Reporting inspector Rhôna Seviour HMI

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

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	The Ridgeway
School category	Community		St Albans
Age range of students	11-18		Herts
			AL4 9NX
Gender of students	Mixed	Telephone number	01727 759240
Number on roll	1146	Fax number	01727 759242
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr M Ellis
Date of previous inspection	6-10 December, 1999	Headteacher	Mr Alan Gray

<b>Age group</b> 11-18	<b>Published</b> November, 2005	<b>Reference no.</b> 280114
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Sandringham School is a larger than average secondary school situated in the north of St Albans. The school was formed in 1988 from the amalgamation of two secondary schools. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals or with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average. One in twenty students has an ethnic minority background and the number for whom English is not their first language is very low. The school has had specialist arts status since 2003 and is also designated as a Leading Edge school and a recommending body for the graduate teacher programme. It holds the Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold awards and also offers services beyond the timetabled day to students and the wider community.

## Key for inspection grades

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

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## Overall effectiveness of the school

Sandringham School has a very strong ethos and a distinctive character. The school is not afraid to be different and much of what it does is innovative and exciting for the students. Students value the outstanding range of curricular and extracurricular opportunities, some of which result from the school's specialist arts status and also from its strong links with local schools and Oaklands College.

The school believes it is good and inspectors agree. Students enjoy coming to school and comment with pride on its achievements. Their involvement in the life of the school helps them to develop as responsible young people. The school's care, guidance and support are outstanding. The strength of the relationships between teachers and students is evident and this contributes to the positive attitudes students have to the school and to learning. Despite this, a small number of students do not always behave well. Teaching in lessons is mostly good and some of it is outstanding, although occasionally it is satisfactory. Teachers are highly committed to the school and they are proud to work there. The school works hard to recruit and retain good teachers but has not always found this easy. It knows that this has led to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Since the last inspection GCSE results have varied and fell in 2004. They improved in 2005 as did results at both Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Inspectors agree with the school that the progress made by the most able students and some younger girls, although satisfactory, could be better and that the standards can also be higher. Weaknesses identified in the last inspection have been tackled, although assessment and marking still needs to be improved and made more consistent. The new headteacher has had a positive impact on the school in the short time he has been there. The leadership group and the governors have a clear view of where the school needs to improve; work has already begun in some areas. For instance, parents welcome the introduction of the newsletter.

Inspectors judge that the school provides good value for money and has the potential to become outstanding.

**Grade: 2**

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

Inspectors agree with the school that a consortium arrangement with two other schools and Oaklands College provides a very effective and efficient sixth form. Expert guidance from teachers and support staff ensures students access a range of academic and vocational courses to suit their needs. A year 12 transition course provides for some students a stepping-stone from year 11 to further study in the sixth form.

Students are well supported and retention rates are very high. Standards achieved are above average as a direct result of good teaching and exceptionally good care. Good study facilities and very effective leadership and management ensure students achieve their very best, act as role models and contribute to school life.

**Grade: 2**

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve the attainment and progress of the most able students and address the differences in the achievements of girls and boys.
- Make the quality of teaching more consistent across all subjects.
- Develop a consistent approach to assessment, including the marking of students' work.

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## Achievement and standards

When students enter the school in year 7 their standards are broadly average. At 14 their national test results are above average and remain so at GCSE two years later. The Key Stage 3 results tend to be higher in mathematics than in English and science, although there was a significant improvement in English results in 2005, particularly in the number of students reaching the highest level.

In 2004 progress to GCSE was satisfactory. In 2005, however, results improved and overall progress was good. No student leaves Sandringham without gaining at least one GCSE pass and the number gaining five or more is significantly above average.

Students achieve well. They make faster progress between ages 14 to 16 than they do lower down the school. Boys do better than girls until age 14 and then girls and boys do as well as each other. The progress of students with learning difficulties and disabilities or English as an additional language is very good. The most able students could do better.

Results in the sixth form have improved in the last two years. In 2005 significant numbers of students achieved higher grades in art, English, mathematics, sociology and health and social care. Standards in performing and visual arts courses are exceptionally good. Most students make good progress as a result of high quality teaching and intensive monitoring by teachers and the sixth form learning mentor. A few students, taught off-campus or committed to part-time work, do not achieve the standards expected of them. The school has achieved its targets and is well focused on improving both standards and achievement.

**Grade: 2**

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## **Personal development and well-being**

Students are proud to attend the school and are good ambassadors whenever they represent it. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance and very good participation in extracurricular activities.

Although there are occasional instances of disruption in lessons and minor instances of bullying, both parents and students say that there has been recent improvement in behaviour, which inspectors judge to be good. Attitudes to learning are good; students listen carefully, make considered responses to questions, and work effectively in pairs and small groups.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Through the rich curriculum, students develop good self awareness, a clear set of values, good social skills, and a thorough appreciation of cultural diversity. They show concern for those less fortunate than they are and are enthusiastic fundraisers. They make a particularly strong contribution to the school community, as the school council is active in many aspects of school life. Many choose healthy food options and physical activities, including dance, are popular choices. The school takes a tough line when students break the rules and this explains the number of fixed term exclusions. Teamwork is well developed and employers speak highly of the qualities that students demonstrate on work experience, such as good communication skills and showing initiative. Sixth formers have clear career aspirations.

**Grade: 2**

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

Inspectors confirm the school's view that teaching is good. Good subject knowledge and positive relationships stimulate students to learn and seek help if work is too difficult. Teachers challenge students to do their very best and consequently the majority make good progress.

Teachers plan interesting lessons that make learning enjoyable. Students are expected to work hard and think for themselves. Questioning is used well to generate discussion and share ideas with others. Good behaviour and positive attitudes are expected in most lessons. In the few lessons that do not engage learners some students interrupt the teacher and distract others.

In the best lessons teachers provide opportunities for students to work cooperatively in pairs and in groups. They offer advice on how students can improve their work, set targets for improvement and encourage students to assess how well they and others are doing. In the few less effective lessons observed by inspectors learning was not well matched to the learners and, as a consequence, some less able students made only limited progress and work was too easy for higher achievers.

Most students are aware of the standards they are achieving, but better and more frequent assessment and marking of their work would provide them with information needed to improve further. Parents told inspectors that they, too, would value more feedback from teachers.

**Grade: 2**

### **Curriculum and other activities**

Curriculum provision is outstanding. The school offers an exceptionally broad and innovative curriculum which it reviews and adapts regularly to meet students' needs. The modular and accelerated GCSE courses in Year 9 and the mix of academic and vocational courses from Year 10 onwards, some based at other schools or the local college, offer students outstanding choice. There are clear progression routes for 14 to 19 year olds and very good support and



guidance to help them make subject choices. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well catered for and there is good additional support. Students have good access to information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons and during break and lunchtimes. The school knows that there is room for improvement in its ICT curriculum and has plans to update and extend its ICT provision.

The curriculum is enriched by an outstanding range of extracurricular activities, particularly in the arts. These are very well attended and much valued by the students. In addition, there are extensive opportunities for students to work in teams and to develop leadership skills. Work experience is well established and there is good provision for work related learning.

The school is responsive to the aspirations of students who do not meet the entry requirements for the sixth form and tailors a special course for a small group who wish to stay on at the school.

### **Grade: 1**

## **Care, guidance and support**

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Students arriving in Year 7 are very well supported and students of all ages say that they feel safe in the school. The arrangements for keeping students safe are good; staff are vigilant, there is good supervision, and risks are carefully assessed

The high quality of relationships between students and staff underpins much of the school's work. Students know that they are valued and so they flourish and make good progress. They understand the pastoral system, which is highly effective. There is very good support for those who experience difficulties, and outstanding liaison with external agencies so that students have access to all the sources of help that they need. This encourages good behaviour and attendance.

High quality academic guidance enables students to make suitable choices about the courses they follow. Sixth formers appreciate the support of a learning mentor, and the school plans to extend this to students in Year 11. Currently, Year 11 students are mentored by members of staff.

Students have a particularly strong voice in the school. For instance, the students' council is involved in staff appointments and in making decisions about campus development.

**Grade: 1**

## **Leadership and management**

Leadership and management are good. Leaders at all levels have a strong focus on raising standards and promoting students' well-being. They contribute well to the school's capacity to improve. Many parents, students and staff commented that the new headteacher has given greater clarity to the direction of the school.

The school knows itself well and is self-critical, taking appropriate action to overcome weaknesses and raise standards. This led to a significant improvement in the examination results in 2005. However, self-evaluation has not been used systematically enough to plan improvements. Students are regularly consulted but some parents do not think that their views are sought often enough. The leadership group has very good plans for improving the rigour and use of self-evaluation.

Staff induction is very effective. All staff appreciate the good support they receive from more senior staff. Relationships are very good and the school has a strong sense of common purpose. The performance of teachers and leaders is managed effectively. The work of faculty heads and year heads is becoming more consistent this year as a result of improved clarity in the guidance from the leadership group.

The school is innovative and makes outstanding use of its partnerships with other schools and colleges to develop and share good practice. The arts college has been led with great enthusiasm. It has had an impact on raising standards across the school and is much appreciated by students.

Governance is good. Governors know the school well, including its strengths and weaknesses. They effectively influence its strategic direction and have recently become more actively involved in creating the improvement plan. The school makes good use of its resources and has made several improvements to

its facilities, including new tennis courts and a dance studio. These are appreciated by students.

**Grade: 2**

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## Inspection judgements

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.</b>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16–19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage		
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
The <i>standards</i> <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How well learners' make <i>progress</i> , taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	<b>2</b>	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<b>2</b>	
The behaviour of learners	<b>2</b>	
The attendance of learners	<b>2</b>	
How well learners enjoy their education	<b>2</b>	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	<b>2</b>	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	<b>2</b>	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community.	<b>2</b>	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	<b>2</b>	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	<b>2</b>	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	<b>2</b>	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	<b>2</b>	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	<b>2</b>	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	<b>2</b>	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily.	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise.	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse.	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are educated about sexual health.	<b>Yes</b>
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe.</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements.	<b>Yes</b>
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place.	<b>Yes</b>
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism.	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them.	<b>Yes</b>
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships.	<b>Yes</b>
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them.	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	<b>Yes</b>
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills.	<b>Yes</b>
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams.	<b>Yes</b>
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in Key Stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form.	<b>Yes</b>
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy.	<b>Yes</b>

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Sandringham School  
The Ridgeway  
St Albans  
Herts

14 October, 2005

Dear Students

Thank you for all the help you gave the inspectors when we visited Sandringham on 12 and 13 October. We enjoyed talking with you. We learned about your enthusiasm for your school and how much you enjoy and value all that it has to offer. You told us that you are proud of Sandringham and we think you are right to be so. It is a good school with some aspects which are outstanding.

Sandringham is an extremely caring and supportive school which provides you with excellent opportunities. There is, for example, an exceptionally wide range of academic and vocational courses, particularly from the age of 14 onwards. These are only available because of the effort the school makes to work with other local schools and Oaklands College and to the creative way it designs your school curriculum. The school's extra curricular programme is outstanding and it is good to see that so many of you enjoy this aspect of school life. Being an Arts College means that you have excellent opportunities in the arts as well as all the other activities on offer.

Relationships between staff and students are very good and you told us how important this is to your enjoyment of school and to your learning. The staff are highly committed and really want you to do well. We know that most of you make good progress and feel that others can do better. Although some of the lessons we visited were good, in others we noticed that some of you found the work too easy or too hard. We have asked the school to look at ways of ensuring that all teaching is as good as the best we saw, and to make sure that your work is assessed and marked more frequently so that you know exactly what you need to do to improve.

We know that the school takes a very firm line if you break the rules. It does this because of its concern for your health and safety and because it wants you to gain as much as possible from your time at Sandringham. We think that some of you can do more to help the school by following the rules, particularly the small number of students who are sometimes disruptive in lessons – this behaviour means that valuable learning time is lost.

Your parents have commented favourably on recent improvements in the school and the positive impact of the new headteacher. You have good senior staff and

## **Annex A**

governors and they, and the headteacher, know what needs to be done to improve. The school council has already led improvements in the school and we believe that, by working together, the staff, students and governors will help make Sandringham a really outstanding school.

We wish all of you success in your studies and thank you once again for your help with this inspection.

Yours sincerely

Rhona Seviour HMI  
Lead Inspector