

Southborough High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102601
Local Authority	Kingston Upon Thames
Inspection number	308066
Inspection dates	16 - 17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Feltham (HMI)

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

Type of School	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	744
Sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Clive Smith
Headteacher	Mr Sunil Chotai
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 2004
School address	Hook Road Surbiton KT6 5AS
Telephone number	020 8391 4324
Fax number	020 8391 0177

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Southborough High School is a smaller than average comprehensive school for boys, situated in Surbiton. It has a small, but expanding, sixth form. It draws its students from families representing a broad mix of social backgrounds within an overall prosperous area. The majority of students are from a white British ethnic background, with around 34% from minority ethnic groups. Numbers of students whose first language is not English are higher than the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around the national average. The school was designated a specialist business and enterprise college in 2005. A new headteacher took up post in April 2007. Following a period of under-subscription, rolls have now begun to rise again in Year 7 and have continued to rise in the sixth form.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Southborough High is a rapidly improving, inclusive school, which operates effectively overall and has many good features. Following a period of uncertainty, which adversely affected many areas of school life, members of the school community now express confidence for the future under the outstanding leadership of the new headteacher. After a period of falling rolls, the number of students applying to the school is rising. The school has recognised that its curriculum did not meet the full needs of all its students, and current changes are fast being implemented, to make sure that all students follow courses that are appropriate to their needs.

Students enter the school with around average attainment - although often with weaker literacy skills - and there have been areas of marked underachievement by Year 11 students in recent years. The majority of average-ability students are now being targeted, as lower-attainers and students with learning difficulties have been well supported and often made good progress in the past. Similarly, the minority of higher-attainers have been challenged well through setting arrangements. Students' achievement is now satisfactory overall, and standards are average. More consistently good teaching is enabling students to make much better progress than in recent years. Although teaching is now good, achievement remains only satisfactory because of a limitation in the curriculum and a legacy of underachievement from previous years. The school recognises that students' writing skills are insufficiently developed and that there is currently no common approach to literacy across all subjects. New systems of tracking students' progress have been introduced and teachers now have a much clearer understanding of where students are underachieving. The many effective teachers in the school are working hard to improve work at all levels, and the school is tackling the few areas of weaker teaching very successfully. Students' behaviour, identified as an element for improvement at the time of the last inspection, is now good. Students respect each other, their teachers and visitors to the school. Students from different ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds work successfully together and the school's ethos is to ensure that they benefit from diversity. Any rare examples of misbehaviour are dealt with swiftly and well; one student reflected the view of many when he commented, 'the new headteacher's got bullying nailed'.

The senior leadership team monitors work in the school rigorously and knows its school in depth. Subject leaders are managed well, and are now reviewing the work of their teams very effectively. Inconsistencies across subjects and within subject teams have been successfully identified and good strategies put in place to address these. Some variability still remains, however. Pastoral support officers, teaching assistants and other support and ancillary staff form a valued part of the school community. Members of staff speak of this being 'a very exciting time' to be working in the school.

The school's governors are committed to the school, have been instrumental in bringing about its new stability of leadership, and now understand the importance of their role in monitoring students' achievement. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the changes currently underway in the school. One parent's view - 'this is now definitely a school on the up' - was echoed by many, as well as by the older students. The school now has a strong and clear vision for the future and is well placed for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Recruitment to this relatively small sixth form has risen in recent years and changes are now underway to meet the needs of all sixth-formers increasingly effectively. Standards and achievement are satisfactory overall. Students obtain good results in some subjects, but there has been too much inconsistency across subjects, with students often not reaching their full potential across the board.

The majority of students have, in the past, studied A and AS level courses. More recently, increasing numbers are following an expanded vocational curriculum. The school has accurately identified a need to make the curriculum more appropriate to the needs of its learners and is implementing a well-structured plan to achieve this. The sixth form offers a good range of extra-curricular opportunities including sport, visits and subject-specific events. Sixth formers play an active part in both the school and local communities, assisting in primary schools, mentoring younger pupils and coaching in sports. Over the last year, behaviour and attitudes have improved and sixth form facilities have been enhanced. Sixth formers are confident and polite. They have clear aspirations and are mostly ambitious for their futures.

The sixth form team of staff supports students well. Students are aware of their target grades and receive guidance on how to achieve them from subject staff and through termly academic review days. Careers guidance for those applying to university is very good and more structured than that given to students on one-year courses in Year 12. The head of sixth form provides strong leadership, with a clear vision for the future. He is introducing an appropriate range of strategies to improve performance, attitudes and aspirations. Current collaboration with a neighbouring girls' school involves a small number of students, but there are plans to develop this further, with a more co-ordinated timetable and rationalisation of provision for minority subjects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a whole-school approach to the development of literacy skills.
- Ensure that best practice in teaching, learning and assessment, is applied consistently across the school.
- Ensure that the curriculum in both the main school and in the sixth form meets the needs of all students.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average, although many have underdeveloped literacy skills. Their achievement across the school is currently satisfactory, but there have been significant areas of underachievement in recent years. Results at age 16 and in the sixth form have shown too much variation across subjects. The school has now introduced rigorous new assessment systems, which enable staff to track students' progress, to spot underachievement and intervene where necessary. Teachers now set their students appropriate and challenging targets for improvement. As a result, work at all stages is improving rapidly and students are now making at least satisfactory progress.

Students identified for specific support within the school achieve well overall. Students whose first language is not English make good progress. Students with learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties or disabilities are well supported, and make at least satisfactory, and often good, progress. The school has recognised that its provision enables higher attaining students to achieve more than those with average, or slightly below average attainment. It now has in place effective strategies to involve all students in assessing their performance regularly and in identifying what they need to do to improve and to achieve their full potential.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy school and appreciate the opportunities it provides. They are enthusiastic about, and respond well to, the range of activities in which they can develop their talents. Students are keen to take part in sporting and creative activities, which encourage them to adopt an active and healthy lifestyle. Behaviour in classes and around the school is good. Students enjoy the great majority of lessons and respond well to good teaching. Relationships are good and adults and students show mutual respect. The system of rewards and sanctions is effective and students understand that actions have consequences. They feel safe and say that the school deals quickly and effectively with any incidents of bullying. Students respect each other's differences in this diverse and inclusive school. Attendance is satisfactory overall and the school is working closely with those specific students whose progress is hampered by poor attendance. Students make a real contribution to decision-making in school and they feel that their opinions are respected. Students willingly take on many different responsibilities in school and in the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has made improving the quality of teaching and learning a high priority. Recent initiatives have focused very successfully on consolidating existing good and outstanding classroom practice and tackling weaker areas of teaching swiftly and effectively. Establishing a commonly agreed behaviour policy has also led to much improved progress in lessons. As a result of these recent improvements, in the great majority of lessons teachers show a good understanding of students' individual needs, maintain a lively pace and use activities, games and resources to motivate boys. Tasks capitalise on the pupils' interests, for example with good use of information and communication technology (ICT); in an English lesson, students used the interactive whiteboard well to analyse and assess their coursework. Good assessment strategies, with challenging targets, are helping to raise standards. In weaker lessons, however, marking does not consistently give students clear guidance on how to improve, and plenary activities are not effective in reinforcing learning. Subject teachers recognise that students' oral work is generally better than their written work, but are not always sure about how to address this in their field of learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's curriculum is satisfactory overall and there are good plans in place to expand it further to ensure that it meets the needs of all students. There is an appropriate emphasis on physical education and sport, which students enjoy. Accelerated groups provide higher attaining students good opportunities to forge ahead. Whilst lower-attaining students and those with learning difficulties receive good support in catching up, the school has yet to establish a strong focus on literacy for all students across the curriculum. The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities, including trips and outings, both abroad and locally. Musical and arts opportunities are growing fast.

The school is aware that its curriculum for 14-to-16 year olds is in need of broadening, and some applied courses and alternatives to GCSE are already on offer. It is developing a more vocationally-oriented approach to ensure greater motivation for students of all interests and capabilities. Currently take-up for languages post-14 is low, but the school is exploring a range of strategies to meet national benchmarks. Plans are also underway to explore collaboration with other local partners to offer an appropriate 14-19 curriculum.

The school's business and enterprise specialism has led the way to a more vocational curriculum for 14 to 19 year olds. Good practice in the specialist subjects has been shared in staff development sessions and enrichment opportunities have proved popular with the students. Links with local businesses have enabled authentic case studies to be used and for students to develop realistic and applied understanding of the work place.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The systems for pastoral care are very good and are considered by parents and carers to be strength of the school. Staff know their students well and give them a sense of security. Vulnerable students, including those with learning or behavioural difficulties or disabilities, are confident that there are adults to whom they can go, should they experience difficulties. Parents appreciate the quality of care and support provided and also express a strong view that the school is improving. Year 7 students appreciate the way in which the transition from primary school is managed, with the Sayers Croft residential experience playing a major role. Students in Years 9, 11 and the sixth form receive good guidance on next steps in their education. The school is aware of the issues relating to health, personal safety and responsible behaviour that are of importance to young people. These are dealt with well through personal, social, health and citizenship education. Child protection arrangements are up to date and clearly understood by staff. Academic guidance is satisfactory and improving. The information from assessment and monitoring is being used to set more challenging and realistic targets to help pupils understand what they could achieve. Achievement is now being monitored and supported very closely.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management in the school is good overall. The current headteacher and his senior leadership team are providing good leadership. They are implementing increasingly effective measures to raise students' achievement, which are already showing an impact. Senior leaders have a good knowledge of their school's strengths and weaknesses, and self-evaluation is honest, accurate and realistic. The new headteacher has provided outstanding and inspirational leadership, recognised by all parts of the school community. Having identified significant student underachievement, he has galvanised colleagues, students and parents to make rapid and successful improvements in many key areas of teaching and learning.

The headteacher and his senior team monitor classroom work closely and current good teaching and learning reflects the successful impact of this strategy. They have successfully improved students' attitudes and behaviour and addressed weaknesses in teaching. Subject leaders demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and they track pupils' progress in their subjects to set clear targets for improvement. Although this practice is not yet fully consistent across all teachers and subjects, clear procedures are in place. Senior leadership intervention ensures that no pupil misses out. Support staff, such as pastoral support officers and teaching assistants, are well deployed and play a key role in raising achievement for the students in their care. Good new line management arrangements have had a significant effect in generally 'raising our game', as one teacher put it.

Recognising that achievement had fallen, the school has made up a lot of ground in a very short period of time. It is working with other schools and with the local authority to plan even better education for the future. Strong leadership, which has the support of the wider school community, now means that it has good capacity for further rapid improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

28 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Southborough High School, Surbiton, KT6 5AS

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we made. First, I should like to thank you for your warm welcome. We enjoyed meeting many of you, listening to your views and watching you at work. Here are our most important findings:

- Your school is now improving rapidly, after a period during which not all students achieved as much as they should have done. It provides a satisfactory education overall, and your new headteacher and his team are concentrating on improving your learning to make sure you all achieve to your full potential.
- School staff are working hard to help you understand how you can do even better in each of your subjects, and this regular assessment is working well.
- Everyone says your behaviour has improved, and we were impressed by this, and by the respect that you show for each other and for adults in the school. You rightly take pride in your multi-ethnic, diverse and inclusive school.
- The school is extending curriculum choice for you, with more vocationally-oriented courses, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
- Your teachers teach you well. They know their subjects and try to find topics and activities that interest you, for example, using ICT and competitions. They check your progress every six weeks and make sure you are keeping up.

We have asked your school to continue to help you make as much progress, as rapidly as possible. We have specifically asked teachers to work together to improve your literacy skills; to ensure that all lessons are as good as the best; and to widen the upper school curriculum to give you even better choices in the future.

We wish you all well as you continue your learning, working hard and aiming high!

Yours sincerely,

Anne Feltham HMI
Lead Inspector

