

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

INSPECTION REPORT

INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002

Name of school:	Sefton Park School
DCSF number:	825/6037
FOCUS number:	421
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mike Thirkell Supporting Inspectors: Neville Grenyer Cecile Corfield Lay Inspectors: Douglas Siderfin Phillip Hutchinson
Dates of inspection:	4 - 7 February 2008

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Section C: The quality of organisation and management

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Sefton Park School

Address of the school: School Lane, Stoke Poges,
Buckinghamshire, SL2 4QA

Telephone number: 01753 662167

Fax number: 01753 662168

Proprietor: Fulmer Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Mr Andrew Purdom

Name of Head Master: Mr Michael Hockley

DCSF number: 825/6037

FOCUS number: 421

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

Age range of pupils and students: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 46 Girls: 36
(Part time) Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 25 Girls: 13

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:
Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Annual fees: No fees charged

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Mr Mike Thirkell
Supporting Inspectors: Mr Neville Grenyer
Mrs Cecile Corfield
Lay Inspectors: Mr Douglas Siderfin
Mr Phillip Hutchinson

Dates of inspection: 4 - 7 February 2008

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by trained lay inspectors who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Focus Learning Trust. Their findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Sefton Park is a co-educational independent school providing education for pupils aged 11 to 18 *'in a Christian-based secure and stimulating environment'*. It exists to provide secondary education for boys and girls *'whose parents appreciate a Christian ethos'*. There are currently 120 students on roll. The school was established in 2005 on its 1.7 acre site, based on a former elementary school, in a semi-rural location on the edge of the village of Stoke Poges in South Buckinghamshire. The present school results from the amalgamation of three former study centres. Pupils attending the school travel from Didcot, Harrow, Kingston, Reading and Wycombe.

The original buildings, constructed in 1876 and listed by English Heritage, have been significantly extended and refurbished. The school is administered by the Fulmer Education Trust. As its governing body, it has the overall responsibility for all operational and academic aspects of the school. It has been recognised by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as an independent school of Special Religious Character and is formally affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust.

The new academic year has been one of significant change. It has seen the expansion of the sixth form provision from one to two years, and a new headmaster has taken over the academic management of the school.

Summary of main findings:

Sefton Park is a successful school. It has developed rapidly during the two years that it has been established on its present attractive site. The learning environment is of high quality overall. Relationships between staff and pupils are notably good. This is an important element, both in the progress made by pupils and their very good personal development. Teaching demonstrates appropriately high levels of expectation. The response of pupils in lessons is good and their behaviour outstanding. Teachers plan their lessons effectively and are skilled in the use of classroom management strategies. Pupils are well cared for and the curriculum provides effectively for their intellectual, physical and creative development. This is the school's first published report by the Focus Learning Trust's School Inspection Service under Section 162a legislation.

What the school does well:

- its teaching is good; a significant proportion is very good with a number of outstanding features, including the use of effective questioning;
- it ensures that at least good progress is made by pupils of all abilities, including those identified as having special learning needs; the good progress achieved by the end of Key Stage 4 is exemplified by the good General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) results;
- it has established good systems for monitoring pupils' progress and is in the process of improving these still further;
- its welfare systems are very good and pupils are well cared for;
- its quality of pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development, is outstanding; and
- it ensures that the cooperation between the academic management team and the trustees provides clear direction for the school.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003, the school should:

- ensure that registers are kept in accordance with regulations (paragraph 3(9)); and
- include reference to admissions procedures in the prospectus to inform parents and prospective parents (paragraph 6(2)(e)).

Next Steps:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the consistency of marking to reflect the quality of the best;
- complete planning related to the development of the sixth form;
- consider strategies for assuring continuity when pupils are withdrawn from lessons; and
- continue to develop tracking procedures for monitoring pupils' progress over time.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 and for most of its sixth form students. It provides well for pupils' intellectual, creative and physical development. The helpful curriculum policy outlines the Focus Learning Curriculum Support Manual's approach to the curriculum within the specific context of Sefton Park. It identifies the provision of '*a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum in a secure and disciplined environment*'.

All subjects have appropriate schemes of work and these have been updated since the school's first monitoring inspection in 2006. The scheme for history is notable in that, as well as being effectively planned, it has been carefully adapted to the school's context. The involvement of groups of older pupils, working with the headmaster, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and curriculum support trustee to evaluate the curriculum provision has been a thoughtful way of involving them in their own learning and development.

The curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 provides opportunity for pupils to have experience of all the required main areas of linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative learning. Subject matter is appropriate to the ages and aptitudes of all pupils, including those identified as having special learning needs. It enables them all to develop appropriate skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. Key Stage 3 includes all National Curriculum subjects, with the addition of typing, citizenship, music, domestic science and Bible Studies. In Key Stage 4, as well as studying a core curriculum of English language and literature, mathematics and science, the latter either as a single or double award, pupils have a suitably wide range of options to choose from as GCSE courses. In addition they take Bible Studies, typing, business study and music. An appropriate course in personal, social and health education is taken by pupils throughout the school and which is relevant to their age. A mapping and audit of the curriculum undertaken in January 2008 identified the very effective coverage of personal, social and health education across the curriculum. The emphasis on speaking skills is a useful feature of the curriculum across the schools' whole age range. Music is a strength of the curriculum, as well as playing a strong and important role in the life and working of the school. The orchestra has a widening repertoire and there is a very successful choir, while a very high proportion of the school take music lessons.

The curriculum for Year 12 is suitably broad and fully adequate to meet the needs of the age group. However, the timetable for Year 13 has been somewhat disrupted by events and, despite some successful features, the timetable for the vocational stream does not fully correspond with the curricular description as set out in the prospectus. Year 12 choose from business studies, English, accounts, mathematics, science, history, geography, Bible Studies, office skills, woodwork, needlework, food & nutrition, building studies, physical education and some PSHE. Year 13 study subjects chosen from office skills, economics, Bible Studies, English public speaking, music, politics and government, accounts, BTEC for vocational students, textiles, physical education, French, and history. There are well advanced plans for a curriculum review with special reference to the sixth form with an aim to widen and strengthen the vocational provision which is not at present judged by the school to be sufficiently rigorous. The school is developing methods to evaluate the curriculum and the use of data in subject planning.

The provision for pupils who require learning support is very good and enables the pupils to make very good progress over time. A detailed policy and helpful support procedures are in place. There are currently 22 pupils identified by the school as requiring special support for their learning. The learning support staff are appropriately qualified to meet the pupils' needs. Other members of staff provide additional support in lessons and work closely with specialist subject and support staff. All teachers have had training in adapting teaching styles for pupils who have learning difficulties.

The time allocated to pupils for extra support is sensibly linked to each pupil's level of need and ranges from six sessions a week to one session. Five volunteers from the Brethren community provide further support effectively and are responsible to the leading learning support teacher. They have regular meetings to discuss pupils' progress. The learning support staff meet regularly once a week to discuss their work and focus their support. Some pupils are withdrawn from lessons, but support staff helpfully try to link the work that they do to what is going on in the lesson. In Key Stage 3, the staff may work in the classroom with the pupils.

Identification of those pupils who may need extra support starts with scrutiny of their previous school records and Year 6 results from National Standardised Assessment Tests. Other base-line assessments take place during the pupils' first term in the school. Pupils will receive help as long as there is a need. For example, some pupils will receive short-term help for GCSE examinations. Individual learning plans (ILPs) are helpfully reviewed once a term and follow the FOCUS recommended format. Parents are fully informed about the school's provision. The leading learning support teacher is available each Tuesday morning to talk to parents and, in addition, is also available at the two parents' meetings each year.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and assessment are good. Teaching has a number of outstanding features and in a minority of lessons it was very good. As a result of the good teaching and the high quality of support provided, pupils of all abilities, including those identified by the school as having learning difficulties, make good progress relative to their abilities. This is reflected in the pupils' results in National Standardised Assessment Tests at the end of Year 9, and further emphasised by the good GCSE results achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4, which are significantly above the average nationally. The high percentage of pupils achieving five higher grade passes, including in English and mathematics, is a notable achievement, given the school's wide ability range. Students in the sixth form make good progress relative to their ability.

The high quality of teaching seen in most lessons is supported by generally good lesson planning. This clearly states the learning objectives for lessons and emphasises the structure and organisation of activities. The high quality of lesson planning reflects the hard work and commitment of both full and part-time teaching staff, and with respect to its consistency, the clear guidance provided by the school management. Lessons are generally well pitched to meet the learning needs of the ages and abilities of the pupils in each class. Sixth form lessons reflect appropriately mature expectations of response, and provide effective support for pupils' intellectual development. For example, in an English literature lesson in Year 12, rigorous interaction provided through discussion of text from the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, and effectively led by the teacher, produced evidence of analysis and interpretation very relevant to the level of study and maturity of the students. Pupils of all ages understand the learning objectives to be achieved

because they are clearly explained to them at the beginning of each lesson. Because of good planning, effective use is made of the time available for the lessons and as a result they usually proceed at a good pace. The quality of teaching and learning is supported by a positive response from pupils and the teachers' understanding of the necessary classroom management skills. It benefits from the fact that teachers are well qualified and are, for the most part, specialists in the subjects that they teach. In the best lessons, teachers demonstrated conviction and infectious enthusiasm, which encouraged pupils to enjoy learning.

Teachers use a range of strategies to develop pupils' interest in learning. For example in a Year 11 science class on the topic of static electricity, learning was effectively reinforced by the good use of resources. In this case a Van de Graff generator was used to demonstrate and extend the pupils' understanding of what they were learning, as well as exciting their interest and enthusiasm for science and the nature of electricity. and positive and negatively charged particles. Overall, resources are sufficient and used well to support a range of teaching and learning activities. The recent provision of computers to enhance pupils' learning experience has still to develop further, but they are already used effectively to support teaching in some subjects, for example to modify data in a Year 13 accounts lesson.

Questioning is used particularly well by teachers and is a strong feature of most lessons. It is used effectively as a tool to challenge pupils to think independently. The best lessons demonstrate high expectations of what pupils will learn, and pupils respond appropriately. In these lessons teachers skilfully draw pupils of all abilities in the class into the learning activity through the carefully modified structure of the questions asked to individuals. In this respect questioning was frequently used to very good effect as a tool to assess individual pupil's understanding and progress. Lessons are typified by positive working relationships between staff and pupils. The positive learning atmosphere in classrooms supports pupils' willingness to respond to questions and consequently supports and enlivens their experience of learning. Overall, emphasis on questioning and praise is used well to support pupils developing self-confidence.

Procedures for assessing pupils' progress are good. When Year 7 pupils join the school, assessments of their abilities in English, mathematics and science are undertaken. This enables teachers to plan work that is well-matched to the range of ability in the year group. Assessments carried out help to identify pupils who may need extra support with their learning. There are formal National Standardised Assessments for pupils in English, mathematics and science during and at the end of Years 7, 8 and 9. These are used to predict grades in GCSE examinations. In 2007, the school introduced interviews with Year 11 and 12 pupils to discuss with staff what the pupils need to do to improve in each subject. The interviews will be introduced throughout the school during this year. The school has recently introduced appropriate systems for tracking pupils' progress over time. This procedure has been piloted successfully in citizenship, history and geography. Although at an early stage of development, the documents provide useful information on pupils' needs. A whole school marking policy is not yet effective in assuring its support for consistency in assessment. Despite some very good examples of marking its quality is variable throughout the school. The best marking informs pupils of how to improve their work. Conversely, some work is left unmarked, which is unhelpful.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good and in some respects outstanding. The overwhelming majority of pupils say that they enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their general demeanour and specifically in their very positive response, for example in an assembly when two girls played contrasting piano pieces beautifully. A curriculum mapping exercise has usefully been undertaken involving three main surveys; firstly the range of PHSE skills and content delivered across the curriculum; secondly, whether the subject areas provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in England, and thirdly, whether subjects enable pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures.

The spiritual development of pupils is enhanced by their experiences in assemblies, where the very good musical offerings by pupils provide opportunities for reflection and the appreciation of beauty. This is combined effectively with an emphasis on the importance of right and wrong behaviour, the importance of rules and laws to protect the weak and encourage fairness and justice. It is significant that so many pupils enjoy and benefit from participating in music making, so much so that at times the choir outnumbers its audience in whole school assemblies. The ethos of the school is all embracing. Behaviour is very good around the school, and in class pupils are lively participants in their own learning. The atmosphere in many classes is one of friendly cooperation in others' learning. PHSE and citizenship are areas of pupils' experience where the school's ethos expresses itself well in this respect.

The school provides all of its pupils with a broad knowledge of public institutions and services in England through citizenship, and through other curriculum subjects including history, geography and business studies. Visits by pupils to the Houses of Parliament, a visit by the shadow Attorney General, Laleham Farm, Beaufort Court, and geography fieldwork on the River Ash, all help and contribute to the enrichment of pupils' learning experiences. Pupils are notably active in supporting local and national charities. Sponsored walks have taken place to support Cancer Research, the Air Ambulance, Macmillan Nurses and Botton Village for the disabled. Sponsored canoeing has raised money for the RNLI and a photography competition raised £510 for Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

Pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being and they say that they consider that the school helps them to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence through opportunities to organise aspects of their work and through public speaking. Many areas of the curriculum adopt a skills based approach to learning through teamwork, as in citizenship and PHSE lessons. Work experience is a valuable component of this aspect of development in Year 10. Courses using computers, business studies, book keeping, office skills, economics, building studies, citizenship and the careers education contribute strongly. This culminates in Year 13 where pupils learn about trading and have opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is very good. There is a strong sense of care and concern for the pupils throughout the school. Policies and procedures on matters such as health and safety and child protection are in place and implemented effectively. A programme of staff training has supported the correct implementation of these policies. Staff who have joined the school since the recent training sessions will receive training later this term. The policy for dealing with bullying has been supported by the pupils' involvement in an "anti-bullying week". Personal, social and health education and Bible Studies play an important part in the school's provision for behaviour management. As a result, the pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their work are good throughout the school. Questionnaires completed by pupils indicate that the vast majority of pupils feel safe in school and are not worried about bullying. The behaviour policy specifies the range of rewards for good work and effort, and sanctions for unacceptable behaviour are detailed. It clearly states that parents will be informed whenever necessary. The school records any incidents of misbehaviour and logs carefully the procedures and outcomes used to address matters. All relevant policies have been reviewed by senior management and updated recently.

Fire drills are held regularly and appropriate records are maintained. All fire equipment, including alarms, is checked conscientiously. Arrangements for First Aid are good. A trained First Aider is in the school at all times and facilities are excellent for pupils who become ill. The school is aware of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has produced an appropriate policy and statement of how access can be improved over the next three years. The admission register contains all the required information. However, the attendance registers contains some alterations that obscure whether a pupil is present or not.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets nearly all of the requirements but one.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

- *ensure that registers are kept in accordance with regulations (paragraph 3(9)).*

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school maintains a single central register which provides details of all required checks of staff, trustees and volunteers.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school buildings provide good accommodation for the number of boys and girls attending the school. Old and new aspects of the original Victorian school buildings have been very sympathetically blended to provide the current good accommodation in the main buildings. Every opportunity has been taken to emphasise the long history of

the buildings as a former elementary village school and to provide a link and sense of continuity through the careful use of old photographs of former teachers and pupils and other symbols from the past, such as 'The Old School Bible'.

Additional accommodation is provided by temporary classrooms which have been imaginatively developed to support the increase in numbers of pupils that has resulted largely from the introduction of Year 13. The school has worked hard to ensure that all aspects of the buildings provide good access. Overall, the school management has made very effective use of all available space. This is well exemplified by the imaginative development of the small room containing a washbasin and toilet which is now provided for pupils who may become ill during the day. Due consideration has been given to assessing risk in the buildings and all checks relating to emergency evacuation have been appropriately undertaken. The development of the buildings has been subject to close scrutiny and subject to appropriate and regular visits from local fire officers, the latest taking place relatively recently in December 2007.

The pupils' learning experience is supported by a range of appropriate specialist accommodation, including two laboratories, an art room, design technology and cookery rooms, a hall and a small but well used library that is suitably resourced for the number of pupils. Specialist accommodation is generally sufficiently well resourced to support a range of practical activities and teaching strategies. The school's limited facilities on-site for physical education are suitably extended by use of a local sports centre. A new well furnished specialist computer classroom has been introduced this academic year to support the development of valuable new skills and to extend learning opportunities for pupils and students. Accommodation to support the provision for learning support is good. A generous amount of space is set aside to provide separate common rooms for boys and girls. In addition there are adequate outdoor play spaces for both boys and girls.

Individual classrooms provide attractive learning environments for teaching and learning and standards of maintenance and decoration are high. The quality of learning environments provided, plays a significant role in the pupils' positive attitude to learning. They demonstrate appreciation and care for the high quality of their school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

The school communicates effectively with parents and most of the required information is readily available. The prospectus provides a range of helpful information to inform parents and prospective parents about its particular aims and ethos together with other information, including details of the curriculum, strategies for supporting pupils and expectations for conduct and behaviour. Appropriate reference is made in the prospectus to additional information about a range of both topics and policies, for example relating to child protection, special needs, educational visits, health and safety and measures to prevent and deal with bullying should it occur. Despite the good range of information provided in most respects the school has omitted to include reference to the school's admissions policy in its prospectus.

The prospectus is supported by a range of other information which includes a handbook for new students and parents. This document provides essential information about necessary matters such as the schools' daily procedures, expectations relating to

attendance, the school uniform, rules and expectations of behaviour and conduct. A termly newsletter 'Sefton Parklife' provides parents and friends of the school with lively and helpful insight into the activities that pupils have been engaged in, their achievements and general school developments. The effectiveness of the communication of these documents is effectively supported by a range of well used photographs. All documents are produced thoughtfully and include contributions from pupils themselves.

The school provides two reports to parents during the course of each school year. In addition parents have the opportunity of attending formal meetings with teachers to discuss their children's progress on at least two occasions each year. Regular contact about their children's work is maintained through homework planners. In general pupils make good use of these planners. In questionnaires completed and returned by parents they generally expressed strong support for the school and its care for their children. Most parents felt that the school keeps them well informed about their children's progress. All parents who responded felt that they understood the school's procedures for handling complaints and that homework is planned carefully to build on what children learn in school, reflecting inspectors' views. Further contact with parents is promoted by regular whole school events which they attend, such as sports day and sports 'tournaments'.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets nearly all the requirements except one.

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

- *include a reference to the school's admission procedures in the prospectus (paragraph 6 (2)(e)).*

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school uses the standard complaints procedure adopted by the Focus Learning Trust and authorised for use in its affiliated schools. It fully meets the requirements. In addition the prospectus provides a brief synopsis of the complaints policy but also includes appropriate guidance by emphasising that a full copy may be requested on application to the school. The prospectus includes the required information relating to complaints made to the school in the previous year, when there were no complaints registered under the formal procedure.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The school has experienced a period of unsettlement, through the amalgamation of three schools, together with consequent severe staff changes,. This now appears to be resolved into an integrated and efficiently operating establishment.

The school is controlled by seven trustees of the Fulmer Educational Trust, under the leadership of a dedicated CEO. It is clear that the headmaster and his staff have full confidence in the CEO and his trustees and that this is reciprocated. The headmaster and his deputy run the school and the staff are positive and enthusiastic. They are all appreciative and supportive of the Trust's ethos and outlook. The headmaster conveys a reassuring, and suitably authoritative atmosphere to the establishment and carries the respect of others, which supports an effective management arrangement. Regular trustee, senior management team and staff meetings are held. The daily staff briefing by the headmaster is appreciated. This all results in a cohesive school.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The development plan now requires updating to meet the challenges of the anticipated expansion to include junior children, with the possibility of at least one remote campus. Developments should be planned in such a way that the success of the secondary educational arrangements are not disrupted or diluted by emphasis on progress elsewhere. The development plan should allow for the review and improvement of post-16 curriculum and facilities in order to retain the confidence of both pupils and parents.

This is a well-run school in good well-developed building arrangements, where staff, pupils and the wider community structure are working in harmony. Space is at a premium and a development to add more permanent classroom accommodation should progress as funds permit in order to allow the further development of dedicated and specialist teaching areas.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Further copies of the report are available from the Operations Manager of the Focus Learning Trust, Siskin House, Siskin Drive, Coventry, or from the Focus Learning Trust website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk