

Validation report:	St Sampson's High School
Validation dates:	w/c 11 May 2015
Managing Inspector:	Gary Johnstone
Type of school:	secondary
Age range of learners:	11-16
Gender of learners:	mixed
Number on roll:	694

Introduction

The validation was carried out by a team of four HM Inspectors, who spent three days in the school observing lessons, talking with learners and looking at their work, engaging in discussions with staff and parents, looking at school records and other documentation, and scrutinising responses to the pre-validation questionnaires.

The context of the school

St Sampson's High School is a modern, purpose-built high school serving the parishes of Vale, St Sampson's and St Peter Port. St Sampson's High School is co-located with Le Murier School, a special school for secondary aged pupils. Together they make up the Baubigny schools; they have a shared Parent Teacher Association and some support staff work between both schools. At the time of the validation visit, the school roll was 694. Students in Year 11 were undertaking GCSE exams during the time of the visit.

How well do young people learn and achieve?

Learners' experiences

Most young people are motivated and eager participants in their learning and they are actively taking clear steps to progress their levels of achievement in subjects across the curriculum. Increasingly, high quality feedback from teachers is helping them to identify their strengths and next steps more clearly. While almost all young people are aware of their targets in subjects across the curriculum, they are not always sufficiently clear about the specific steps they need to take to secure or maximise their progress. Regular opportunities for peer and self-assessment are common features of young people's learning in most classes. In most classes, young people are well supported to peer-assess effectively through the use of focused and targeted frameworks. Young people work very effectively with each other in regular partner or small group collaborative tasks and are respectful of each other's views and contributions.

From classroom observations, most young people, including those who are more vulnerable, are making good progress from their prior level of attainment. Stimulating displays of young people's work in most classrooms are helping to motivate young people in raising their expectations and in producing higher quality responses within their learning activities.

Overall, young people at all stages tell us that they are very satisfied with the school's provision. The majority tell us they enjoy their learning and are provided with good levels of care and support by the team of approachable staff. Most young people are making a sound and significant contribution to the school's work and that of the wider community, for example through participation in sponsored events to raise school funds, support for local senior citizens care homes, raising funds for international disaster relief efforts and through acting as buddies and mentors for their junior peers. From the pre-validation questionnaires, almost all young people think that staff expect them to take responsibility for their work. They feel they are getting along well with their work; that staff encourage them to do their best; that they get help when they need it; and staff listen and pay attention to what they say.

There is a broad range of activities and experiences planned beyond the classroom which enrich young people's learning, for example across sport, music and drama. Other opportunities such as Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) are built into the wider curriculum and help to further extend young people's learning.

The school looks to extend young people's experiences beyond the school through off-site visits to other facilities and centres within Guernsey such as Footes Lane for athletics and international visits beyond Guernsey for example to London, France and Italy.

There are strong links with local sports clubs in rugby, cricket, athletics and football with competitive school fixtures across a number of sports for both girls and boys at all stages. The school performs well particularly in football, netball and rugby and well established links through the Guernsey Sports Commission ensure that opportunities

for young people in school are further built upon, and extended as appropriate - often into a wider range of activities beyond traditional competitive sports in the community. The school has a very good level of representation in Guernsey teams at inter-island sporting events. Over 200 young people have represented the school in at least one competitive school sporting fixture across the current academic year. The school should look to further progress its plans in auditing all young people's involvement in out-of-class learning to ensure that the rich range of opportunities available are being fully capitalised upon by all of the school's young people in at least one area.

A few staff, young people and parents are anxious about the behaviour of a minority of young people who they feel cause difficulty in a small number of classes across the school. They feel that there is scope for greater consistency in the way staff across the school deal with the disruptive behaviour of some young people.

All departments within the school should look to gather, act upon and give feedback to young people regarding the outcomes of more regular, planned consultations and surveys of their views about aspects of their departmental experience, with a focus on learning and teaching. There is scope for the school to develop how it involves all young people in making decisions about the work of the school and to move the focus of dialogue and discussion of the Student Council more often onto learning and teaching matters.

From the pre-validation questionnaires, 53% of young people think that staff talk to them regularly about how to improve their learning. Only 40% think that they have a say in making the way they learn in school better and 48% think that the Student Council is good at getting improvements made in the school.

Improvements in performance

The school's main strategic goal is to raise achievement by increasing the value that it adds to student performance. Through learning together, the school aims to develop a community of happy and successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. Young people's achievements are celebrated well in regular newsletters and on the school's website. Staff are committed to using a mix of approaches including assemblies, noticeboards, social media and a 'celebration of achievement' evening.

Leadership

Students display their leadership skills as part of the Senior Leadership Group (head girl and boy and two deputy head girls and two deputy head boys) and as prefects. Year 10 students act as buddies for Year 7 young people as they start at St Sampson's High School. There are opportunities too for young people to act as leaders within the three houses as captains and vice captains. Young people build on their talents and interests whilst developing their leadership capacity through acting as library helpers and as members of the technical crew to facilitate shows and events.

The uniformed organisations including the Boys' Brigade, Cadets and St John's Ambulance allow groups of young people to participate, organise themselves and others and gain useful leadership and teamwork skills. For some young people, these provide life-changing opportunities.

This academic year, six young people passed their level 1 refereeing qualification in rugby. They successfully helped to organise and officiate at a Saturday tag rugby session involving over 200 children and young people and supporting in 113 games over four hours.

The school has two representatives on the Youth Commission's Youth Forum, who take their responsibilities very seriously. They see this forum as an opportunity to bring about change for the young people in the Bailiwick. Discussions have focused on issues affecting young people such as drugs and alcohol, boredom, exam pressure, mental health and food served in the school canteens across high schools in Guernsey and Alderney.

Sustainability/citizenship

Well over £1,100 was raised by young people taking part in the latest swimarathon. This money supported a number of local charities. The school's sponsored walk raised over £5,000 and was supported by local business and families. Young people help to organise Fairtrade events, Comic Relief activities and take part enthusiastically in an annual Everest challenge.

Sport

Large numbers of young people across the school take part in a wide range of physical activities and sports which develop resilience, self-esteem, physical fitness and confidence. Clubs on offer include athletics, hockey, netball, badminton, rugby, football and basketball. Young people competing individually or in school teams are achieving high standards in, for example, football, basketball, hockey and cross-country, with some at inter-island and national level. They take pride in representing their school and local community. The following successes have been achieved.

- Young people representing the island at girls' rugby and netball. Also, recent netball success where the team won most of their matches at the annual netball competition on Jersey.
- Years 7 and 8 have recently played with enthusiasm in island tournaments. Teams from all year groups have had increased success in leagues with two of the teams taking part in cup finals.
- In cross-country, Years 7 and 8 had a number of young people achieving success in finishing in the top 20 in the island schools' competition.
- The school's Years 7 and 8 girls' team were joint winners of a touch rugby tournament.

Culture

Young people are achieving success in the arts, building their skills and confidence through performances and creative productions including the school's highly acclaimed music, art and drama (MAD) evening. Other achievements are listed below.

- A Year 9 student won the junior prix d'honneur for poetry at the Guernsey Eisteddfod for her writing. A number of talented young people achieved merits and distinctions at recent associated board exams for instruments including piano and drums.

- Groups of young people from Year 7 produced lanterns for the local charity lanterns parade and artwork from a group of gifted and talented students was showcased at a creative soloist evening in the school.
- As part of the Year 6 into Year 7 'What makes a good story?' competition, four young people represented the school at the competition between the Island's High Schools, the Grammar School and Ladies' College.
- Some young people benefit from attending the school music service and Saturday music centre to play together with other talented musicians and to hone their musical skills.

Work and enterprise

Young people in Years 9 to 11 were supported by colleagues in the Education Department, Careers Guernsey, commerce and employment through recently attending the careers show where awareness raising of opportunities, raising of aspirations and development of employability skills were tackled. In Year 11, young people are taking part in the national Young Enterprise programme and developing confidence and communication skills through planning their activities and by designing and producing their goods for sale across Alderney and Guernsey. Opportunities to share the project with a range of groups are helping to develop young people's presentation and leadership skills. Funds raised are donated to the school's chosen charity. A group of Year 11 students won a number of awards for marketing, sales and teamwork for their 'Guernsey Top Trumps' game which were sold across Guernsey and Alderney. The school has a helpful careers page on its website that keeps young people up to date with information about local vacancies and employment advice. The school received very positive feedback from employers and the community regarding the young people on work experience placements and those on opportunities week. The school's careers department has worked towards attaining the 'Investors in Careers' award for improving students' awareness of opportunities, raising their aspirations and working with young people to help them achieve.

The school should continue with its plans to refine its approaches to monitoring young people's achievements and involvement and targeting opportunities to young people who otherwise may miss out.

Young people's attendance in 2014 saw all but Year 9 exceed 90%, with the attendance of young people in Year 11 averaging 93.5%. The school has worked hard recently to reduce exclusions. This session the number of students excluded, the total number of exclusions and the number of days lost through exclusions have all been reduced. This has been achieved through a range of approaches, and the creation of the Centre for Student Inclusion (CSI) has the potential to reduce these numbers further in order to give more young people the chance of improved, positive outcomes.

The school is data rich. Since the school's last validation visit, increasingly intelligent use is being made of the data available to track and monitor young people's attainment, and to set targets for improvement at individual, departmental and whole school level. Moderated judgments at Key Stage 2 made by teachers in primary schools are used as the starting point for the tracking the progress and learner journeys at St Sampson's High School. The prior attainment of Year 7 pupils on entry to St Sampson's High School is studied with regard to English, maths and science.

Improvement targets are set at cohort and individual levels. The school's targets are informed by national age-related expectations, though sometimes the school sets more challenging targets. The school, in line with other secondary schools on the island, uses standardised assessments in Year 7 and Year 10 to provide further data on individual pupils' performance.

From data provided by the States of Guernsey Education Department, between 2013 and 2014, St Sampson's High School made the second highest percentage improvement within the Federation of secondary schools in respect of GCSE results. For example, the percentage of pupils achieving 5 A*- C grades including maths and English rose by 19.1% from 33.1% to 53%; 5 A*- C grades rose by 16.7% from 48.3% to 65% and 5 A*-G grades rose by 8.3% from 83.4% to 91.7%. These positive figures now provide the school with a strong platform on which to build further. Evidence shows that currently almost all young people are making progress against targets set by the school and Education Department. In 2013-14, the majority of young people made three levels of progress in English (73%) and maths (65%) by the end of Year 11. In 2014, over 25% of young people made four levels of progress in English and maths.

Levels of literacy and numeracy are variable amongst pupils on entry at Year 7, and staff in St Sampson's High School are working hard to build on these core skills. Growing numbers of young people in Years 7 and 8 are achieving success through the accelerated reader programme. Their reading skills are being enhanced and their success is celebrated widely within the school and with parents. This is encouraging reading in a competitive yet supportive climate, whilst helping young people to choose books at the right level, develop further their reading skills and understanding and ultimately improve their chances of success in exams. The librarian is playing a key role in encouraging young people and managing the process. Teachers across the school are positive about, and supportive of, this initiative which they see is allowing young people to better access the wider curriculum.

The English department's gifted and talented club has encouraged young people through opportunities to have challenging discussions about texts with young people from other schools. They have enjoyed creating some historic fiction in collaboration with other schools and to produce displays and presentations about a shared study of a Shakespeare play.

Maths and English teachers are targeting support for young people in Year 11 through offering additional intervention periods. Extra tuition in subjects allows intensive support to smaller groups of learners to attain better grades. Young people involved in this intervention reported that they had grown in confidence and had made more rapid progress through this additional support, and had higher aspirations as a result.

Whilst recognising that some good progress has been made in improving Key Stage 4 results, there remains a job to be done in maintaining these levels of attainment and raising them further. The school's three year rolling average for 5 A*-C GCSEs at 42.7% still sits below some other island schools and is short of the UK average. The school should continue to reduce the number of young people who leave St Sampson's High School with less than 5 A-G GCSE awards. All staff should continue to develop a culture of high expectation across the school.

The school's improvement plans in recent years have successfully focused on improving the pupil experience and raising attainment. Staff have made good progress with targets and priorities within the school improvement plans, for example, reducing inconsistency in teaching approaches across departments and having more consistent and robust approaches to teaching and learning.

How well does the school support young people to develop and learn?

Teaching for effective learning

Overall, in lesson observations during this validation visit HM Inspectors found most lessons to be very good and young people responded well to generally well-paced and interesting lessons. In a small number of lessons, both the learning climate and teaching approaches employed were outstanding. Staff were very well prepared and had clear plans in place to support very effective learning through appropriately planned and resourced tasks.

There is good evidence to suggest that the school's work in implementing the Outstanding Teacher Initiative (OTI), in developing Teaching and Learning Communities (TLCs) and working groups and in encouraging 'growth mindsets' is impacting meaningfully on young people's experience in classes through a more varied menu of teaching approaches, and greater consistency of high quality feedback. This supports more enabling, capacity-building dialogue in classes and fosters a 'can do' attitude amongst young people. All in all, there has been a sustained focus on improving learning and teaching across many aspects of the school's work,

Appropriately pitched and well-earned praise is used well to recognise young people's efforts across classes. In a few lessons, for example in English, well-structured and carefully scaffolded learning is helping young people to engage well with and understand challenging texts – such as Shakespeare, Dickens and Conan Doyle. There is scope for these types of approaches supported by very high expectations of engagement to be more widespread. Overall, home learning activities are well planned to link with and build upon prior learning. Many were suitably open ended and project based to encourage and develop young people's organisation, responsibility and independence.

Explanations and instructions were clear in almost all observed lessons with young people being able to relate their learning readily to real life contexts. Relationships between almost all young people and staff were very positive and were critical in creating both a positive and enabling environment for learning in classes. While there are some very good examples of teachers extending young people's thinking through very effective questioning and high expectations, there is scope for this to be more consistent in all classes.

In almost all lessons, young people were actively encouraged to discuss and express their views in pairs and small groups and with the whole class. Almost all staff, prompted young people to think more deeply about their learning through targeted,

more challenging and supplementary questions. Where practice was most effective young people formulated their own questions for their peers. In a few lessons, young people's responses were carefully built upon and taken around the class enabling several young people to contribute to the final detailed and sophisticated response.

The purpose of the lesson was shared clearly with learners in almost all lessons through for example a consistent whole school approach to setting and framing learning intentions and success criteria. In a few classes, approaches here were outstanding and exemplary, for example where these were suitably differentiated according to all, most and some young people and where young people discussed and formulated their own success criteria. Almost all staff are adept at demonstrating and illustrating for young people what a good, and/or very good response would look like to enable them to be clear about the essential criteria for up-levelling their work.

In almost all lessons, staff are skilled at intervening appropriately to provide effective support and/or challenge to young people in their learning. Almost all staff are highly skilled in providing personal one-to-one support for young people to encourage and move them forward in their learning and are equally adept and alert to those young people who required further help in overcoming barriers to their learning. Well-structured lessons, overall, ensure that staff used plenaries well to reflect upon learning and progress, and to reinforce the key aspects while linking meaningfully to future activities. A few staff ensured that this was carried out in particularly creative ways.

In some classes, young people made good, effective and appropriate use of tablets to research topics and to record and analyse their own performance and progress. A few staff made very effective use of interactive whiteboards and film or media clips to grab young people's attention at the beginning of the lesson, to illustrate points or contextualise learning more meaningfully for young people. This helped to reinforce learning and provide motivating and engaging contexts. Staff and young people appear excited about the potential of the 'Show My Homework' app as a programme to support and reinforce in-class learning in a meaningful and engaging way. The school should continue with their plans to evaluate and review the wider use of tablets to ensure that the school's work here is fully and meaningfully impacting on young people's learning and progress.

In a small number of classes observed, there was evidence of some low level activities and tasks which did not sufficiently challenge all learners. In these instances, there is scope for higher expectations of what young people can do and achieve and for the planning of more challenging tasks which are progressed more briskly. Similarly in a few lessons, some young people were not fully attentive to whole class discussions and the sharing of key points of information.

In a few lessons, there was scope for learning intentions and success criteria to be more focused around specific skills and knowledge, and for teachers' feedback in exercise books to be similarly more focused. Staff should continue to review the proportion of time spent within lessons, on discussions about formal assessments and associated criteria to ensure that it does not detract over time, from purposeful, meaningful and enriching learning activities. While there are some very good examples of young people being set appropriate tasks to support and extend their

skills of independence and to take greater responsibility for their own learning and development, staff should continue to look to share this practice more widely across all aspects of young people's experience. Staff should continue to review the recently introduced approach to lesson planning to ensure it continues to support high quality learning and teaching, and that this can be sustained for the long term.

Meeting learning needs

In most lessons, teachers set tasks and activities at the right level to meet the learning needs of most young people. In the best examples, they know young people with specific needs well and differentiate effectively to ensure their success. In most lessons, young people work on appropriately challenging activities. In a few, the level of challenge is significantly higher, staff are skilled in questioning and young people are challenged in their learning and encouraged to provide more detailed responses. For example, in religious studies and physical education, young people willingly respond to high expectations. There is scope to further develop approaches to differentiation so that learning moves away from being too lock-step with young people carrying out the same task regardless of their prior learning.

Overall, the pace of learning is suitable in most lessons through well-structured and timed tasks and a suitable range of resources. For example, in business studies young people moved through their learning at a brisk pace when attempting controlled assessment questions on analysis and evaluation. In a few lessons, whilst teachers were well aware of young people with special educational needs, they did not plan learning to take sufficient account of their needs or use appropriate support. In the few classes observed where the pace of learning was too slow, more account needs to be taken of individual learners' needs, and opportunities should be developed to increase appropriate pace and challenge.

In lessons observed in the Autism and Communication Base, tasks and activities are, on the whole, suitably planned to meet the needs of young people. They are supported in individual, paired and group activities. When in mainstream classes, they are seen to be suitably supported by their mainstream class teachers and can access appropriate additional support from teachers, and/or learning support assistants, from the Learning Communication Resource (LCR), if required.

Young people with special educational needs are identified in line with procedures and guidelines set out by the Education Department. Information transferred from feeder primary schools, reading and spelling tests carried out in Year 7, standardised assessment information and information from external agencies and concerns raised by staff and other stakeholders provide a comprehensive overview of young people who may experience difficulties in their learning.

Young people identified as more vulnerable are tracked with regard to their attendance and attainment over a range of subjects. Interventions are in place to support young people who exhibit unhealthy lifestyle choices, such as the ASSIST programme for those young people in Year 8 in a bid to prevent smoking. The school puts in place enhanced transition arrangements for some young people, working in partnership with other local educational establishments. These arrangements focus on providing the personal and emotional support necessary for pupils to settle in well and approach

their learning positively. The school would welcome a more coherent and streamlined system which would allow key information and intelligence from different sources about individual young people to be centralised.

All staff aim to provide a caring and nurturing environment for all young people throughout all areas of the school, including bases. Young people regard most of their teachers as being approachable and supportive in their learning. Young people and parents are appreciative of the commitment and willingness demonstrated by staff who 'go the extra mile' and offer additional learning opportunities, for example through supported study.

Teachers provide additional experiences to extend those that have been identified as gifted, able and talented young people. For example, a project delivered in the English department in the form of 'Dead Poets' Society' enables learners to undertake learning activities that extend their high order thinking skills. The extension of this project to humanities in the form of applying skills in unfamiliar contexts has the potential to further enrich the demands placed upon high achieving students. Learning support assistants (LSAs) play a strong role in supporting young people with additional support needs across the school. They deliver a range of targeted courses and programmes including individual support for those with learning difficulties, for example the Read, Write, Inc. programme. They provide support in core lessons, in the CSI for young people with emotional needs, and for those young people displaying behavioural difficulties.

The Behaviour Education Needs Co-ordinator (BECO) has put in place specific interventions to deal with instances of disruptive behaviour across the school including the setting up of alternatives to exclusion in the form of the CSI. The behaviour cohort tracker in place is a robust and rigorous approach to track the levels of indiscipline over time for different year groups. In addition, the targeting of those who regularly display behaviours falling short of expectations is more specific. The number of behaviour points both as an average and as a total has fallen over time and per year group. The school has made a good start to establishing provision in the form of their CSI for young people who may be at risk of exclusion. The school should continue with their plans to monitor the effectiveness of this provision.

There are clear procedures in place to establish a consistent approach throughout the school in relation to improving pupil attendance. Engagement with parents and approaches to dealing with non-attendance include: sending termly letters informing parents of current levels of attendance including the statistical evidence of the impact on attainment; innovative ideas such as displaying the importance of attendance on milk cartons sold across the Bailiwick; coverage and promotion of the message on local radio and television; and acknowledging the good attendance of most young people through issuing gift vouchers. There are examples of specific interventions by staff targeted at supporting young people with support needs, both special educational needs and those who have emerging needs with work experience. For example, providing additional support for pupils on work experience for those displaying anxiety, or visiting work experience placements to ensure that young people are settled.

The current child protection framework in place to support young people is in line with Children's Law Guernsey and Alderney Act 2008. The pre-validation questionnaires

indicate that all staff are clear about their responsibility in relation to protecting children. Staff training on recognising signs and indicators of child abuse with scenario exercises is relevant, meaningful and well-judged. The Education Department's self-evaluation pro-forma for approaches to child protection is comprehensive and effective in judging the confidence levels of staff following any professional development sessions. For the identified group of young people who have been referred to the Children's Convenor, there is evidence of child's plan submitted, hearing dates, care requirements, outcomes and comments on attendance.

Learning support assistants would welcome the opportunity to meet collectively with their Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) formally to discuss emerging issues and share practice on a more regular basis. In addition, LSAs would also welcome some personal planning time to enable them to better meet the needs of identified young people through greater dialogue with classroom teachers.

Young people have mixed views about the perception of how well staff deal with bullying behaviour. The school should continue to review current arrangements to deal with this important agenda, including those young people who access mainstream classes from the Autism and Communication Unit. In doing so, it is important that young people are given the freedom to lead developments in line with promoting positive relationships. Parents we spoke to would welcome a change in the format of the current school report to make them more fully aware of their child's strengths and areas for development across the subjects they take.

Curriculum

The rationale for the curriculum is based on the school's aims of raising standards of attainment and achievement and providing pathways to positive destinations. Currently, access to a breadth of subjects is an important design principle of the school's curriculum. Through ongoing collaboration within the Federation of secondary schools across the Bailiwick, a greater choice of courses will be available to young people. Young people in Years 7 to 9 follow a curriculum which is broad and balanced, in line with the Bailiwick curriculum statement. There are opportunities for young people to develop as successful learners, effective contributors, responsible citizens and confident individuals. The Years 7 to 9 curriculum is designed to provide all young people with their entitlement to a broad education allowing young people to learn across curriculum areas. The school has recently decided that the Learn2Learn based course, which aims to assist young people to be more independent and confident learners, will be taught only at Year 7, and this has been adapted to fit more closely with the local context.

Opportunities for learning through the ethos and life of the school includes membership of one of the three houses. Young people have collective responsibilities to work for the success of their house through participation in a range of events such as those on Comic Relief day and in encouraging active involvement in the life of the school. House captains take roles in the house assemblies, sharing successes and achievements and encouraging young people to participate in a range of activities.

Young people are given good advice and support to begin to make choices in their curriculum during Year 9. Intervention classes and small group work as well as gifted

and talented activities help cater for the broad range of skills, interests and talents within the young people. Classes have been introduced as part of a school commitment to broaden learners' experiences, promote engagement and raise attainment. Activities are well-planned, linking to skills development and to prior learning.

In Years 10 and 11, young people follow a range of compulsory courses some of which lead to examinations. Compulsory examination subjects include English, maths, science, information and communications technology (ICT) and religious studies. Subjects which are compulsory but non-examinable include careers, citizenship, physical education and games. Over twenty examinable subjects in addition to ASDAN CoPE, include catering, fashion and textiles, drama, astronomy and photography.

Young people in Year 10 are taking part in and gaining awards for courses at the College of Further Education in construction and engineering, catering, personal finance, business and communication, hair and beauty, performing arts and public services and health and social care. In Year 11, some students have achieved very well through gaining the equivalent of an AS Level in finance.

The librarian supports the work of a number of departments who aim to develop young people's digital literacies and information and research skills. As a result of the success of the accelerated reader programme, an increasing number of individual young people use the library for their own reading for information and pleasure. An author visit and project have encouraged young people to value reading and writing. Young people are encouraged to reflect on their own literacy skills. The school is now beginning a similar drive to developing young people's oracy skills. In classes and in focus groups, most young people spoke confidently to HM Inspectors and listened well to their teachers and to each other. They showed a mature attitude in discussions and were respectful of the opinions of others.

Enhanced transition arrangements are discussed fully to ensure appropriate support is in place to allow vulnerable young people to make the move from the primary to secondary school. The transition arrangements for all Year 6 children have been increased in terms of the number of days that children from primary schools visit St Sampson's High School. Children in Year 6 from the feeder primary schools attend for eight week blocks to visit the maths department. They build their skills and confidence in group tasks and are well-engaged through activities such as 'murder, mystery and the rounding rap' which motivates and engages them very well. The technology department gives interesting taster experiences to Year 6 children which includes designing and decorating a cake box and cover, and then baking and icing cakes which they take home in the boxes to present as a gift.

To support the transition of older students, the school's work on developing employability skills is strong with all Year 10 young people experiencing business/work placements. Young people say they feel very well supported by the careers advice they receive. Visits to the Sixth Form College and College of Further Education help young people in Year 10 to consider their options and gain knowledge about courses on offer. Staff from both institutions also visit St Sampson's High School to talk to parents and students about what they offer.

Learners, particularly in Year 11, are proactive in developing ideas about their future and are acquiring the skills and knowledge to plan their careers effectively and gain experience of the world of work. Vocational guidance, in the form of a careers advisor and work related learning, is very effectively supporting young people to move onto positive and sustained destinations, whether in the form of higher and further education or work. Relevant, up to date information and advice is provided to young people who require it. The careers advisor is hugely committed and determined to ensuring that all young people progress onto positive destinations through the input provided in either class or one to one sessions.

Links with employers provide experience which support the curriculum and enhance young people's learning. This work is carefully planned by the careers advisor and focuses on developing a wider awareness of the world beyond St Sampson's High School. Employers value the input from the careers advisor and others who support young people effectively while undertaking work experience placements, for example an international banking/finance company supporting young people in their participation involving setting up a business as part of the educational charity. School engagement with employers is positive with strong evidence of increased uptake rates for young people involved, or indeed young people moving onto apprenticeships with the local construction industry. In addition, the 'work experience achievement evening' is to be commended for affording young people the opportunity to showcase their skills and attributes to employers.

Partners spoke very positively about their experience in delivering aspects of the curriculum in St Sampson's High School. They feel that the school is highly proactive at seeking their involvement and very-well organised in ensuring their work can have the maximum impact. They feel that their contribution is valued; that the young people are well prepared for the work the partners do and that there is good follow-up to build on what they have done. They felt the school was welcoming and well-prepared. Although they have evaluated their own work as part of the organisations they represent, they have not yet been asked for feedback from the St Sampson's High School staff. This would provide valuable and very positive feedback on which the school could build.

The school should continue to gather evidence to inform on-going improvements to the range of progression routes available to young people in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Continued work on school-wide approaches to assessment should provide reliable and valid evidence which will help inform understanding of the strengths and areas for development.

There is a need to continue to review the curriculum in the light of the developments within the Federation. This will further support young people to develop skills in a wider range of areas. Planned, progressive opportunities for achievement that develop skills, capabilities and attributes of young people should be further developed. There is also scope to increase the range of opportunities available to young people at Key Stage 3 to develop and gain accreditation for their skills such as leadership, citizenship and enterprise, for example through the John Muir Award. As the curriculum continues to evolve, staff should evaluate the impact of the planned changes to ensure the best possible outcomes for all learners. As an exemplar, staff

could evaluate how the outcomes for learners are improved through off-site courses and how this is impacting on learners' confidence, motivation and personal development.

The careers advisor, with the support from the school, should continue with plans to exploit the full range of additional experiences that employers can provide. For example, provision by an international bank to up-skill young people on employability skills through their online tutorials, or attempts to counteract gender stereotypes in the construction industry. In addition, appropriate priorities have been identified in the careers and work-related learning improvement plan for building on prior learning to ensure a progressive development of knowledge, skills and attributes. This includes scoping the possibility of introducing a GCSE qualification in careers education into the curriculum.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Improvement through self-evaluation

Staff, teaching and non-teaching, across the school, clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to improvement. Staff work very hard to provide the best education they can for young people. Parents and young people really appreciate this. Teachers regularly reflect on their teaching approaches to improve the quality of young people's learning experiences. Many staff are willingly sharing and developing good practice in working groups. This has led to improvements in approaches to assessment, teacher questioning and in approaches to lesson planning.

The senior leadership team and many staff across the school are outward-looking in reviewing their practices to ensure that they are up to date and are providing children and young people with learning that is stimulating and demanding. The school has very effective quality assurance systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of learning and teaching. Each year, the school evaluates how well they have carried out their key priorities and what the priorities will be for next year. They do this very well by carrying out lesson observations, tracking and monitoring of young people's progress and carrying out checks on the standard of pupils' work. Heads of department, along with their staff, carry out regular and detailed evaluations of the standards they are achieving within their subject areas. As a result, they produce helpful action plans to take forward departmental and whole school priorities. In addition, senior leaders carry out a programme of departmental inspections in order to monitor standards.

The school is well supported by their link officer from the Education Department who has complemented the schools' own self-evaluation approaches by taking a closer look at aspects of learning and teaching across the school, such as the quality of teachers' marking and feedback to pupils. He has also provided valuable support to the school in developing teachers' approaches to planning and evaluating learning. Taken together, these focused approaches to self-evaluation are leading to improvement.

Alongside devising new ways to seek the views of all stakeholders, the school should continue to develop approaches to communicating effectively the results of

consultative exercises and the subsequent actions or decisions taken. As the school continues to embed the new self-evaluation framework How Good is Our School?, they should, as planned, review and streamline the departmental and whole-school improvement planning processes.

Leadership of improvement and change

The headteacher has a strong and clear vision for the school, where young people receive the best education to succeed and develop their ambitions. She has high expectations of all staff and young people. The headteacher consistently involves teaching staff in school matters and encourages others to take on roles and responsibilities, thus developing a culture of leadership for learning. She is strongly supported by the team of deputy and assistant headteachers who bring complementary skills and knowledge to the leadership team. Individually, they lead very well in their areas of responsibility and provide staff with strong practical advice, guidance and are well respected by all staff, children, young people and the school's partners. The results of their very effective leadership are demonstrated in areas such as the impact of the OTI and the accelerated reader programme, and the school's approaches to promoting e-safety and student wellbeing. Heads of department and many teaching staff are leading curricular developments successfully and provide children and young people with helpful advice, guidance and different learning experiences.

As a result of all of these focused approaches to self-evaluation, the senior leadership team is very knowledgeable of areas of good practice within the school and those areas that require further development. This includes departments which are delivering extremely well for their learners and individual teachers who demonstrate best practice in teaching and learning. Where action is needed to improve aspects of education delivery, senior leaders provide well-judged support and challenge in order to bring about change. They proactively seek advice and support from the Education Department, as and when necessary.

There is a strong and evident ethos of improvement and change throughout the school. Many teachers have completed the OTI and in these classes, the positive impact of their professional learning on learners' experiences is clear. The school is in the process of extending this successful programme further by teachers acting as trainers for their colleagues. The systematic approach to improving the reading ability of children in Year 7 is commendable. All staff have embraced this creative and successful whole-school approach to improving literacy standards. The science department have recently set up Facebook pages to allow parents to engage more readily with their child's learning. All homework is logged there and parents are encouraged to email staff with any questions. A number of departments, including physical education and maths, have used Twitter to support students and their parents with homework reminders, news and online tests and resources.

Teachers participate in, and benefit from, a range of professional learning opportunities. They are members of working parties and committees that are leading important approaches to learning and teaching. The school organises visiting speakers and specialists to deliver training that informs and challenges teachers' thinking and links very well to their teaching. Many teachers have led learning and

teaching sessions at staff development days to share good practice. Young people enjoy the opportunities that they have to help lead aspects of school life. For example, as house captains, Student Council year representatives, mentors and as reading buddies. Senior leaders should, building on the positive and growing culture of self-evaluation across the school, provide more opportunities for teachers to observe and share the strong practice that exists in the staff team, thus developing further leadership for learning.

Stakeholders' views

Most parents feel that the school has improved how it communicates with them by using social media, for example through the website, text messages, Twitter and Facebook. The recently introduced 'Show My Homework' website and app is popular amongst parents and young people. In the pre-validation questionnaire, only one third of parents agreed that the school asks for their views. The school should continue with their plans to seek ways to engage parents more fully in their children's learning and in the life and work of the school. Overall, young people are very proud of their school and many have good ideas about how to make the life and work of the school even better. Pupils in the Student Council are keen to help to improve aspects of school life. There is scope to now capitalise on young people's enthusiasm, analytical and communication skills by involving them more directly in evaluating their learning experiences in classes and across the life of the school.

Building on the very positive links with the wide range of community partners, the school should extend their self-evaluation approaches to gather their partners' views in order to help shape future improvement priorities.

Summary

Capacity for improvement

The school has taken focused action to address the main points for action since their last validation visit. As a result, teachers' marking and feedback to young people has much improved and the data on young people's attainment is more robust. In addition, the school's clear focus on improving standards in learning and teaching is having a positive impact on young people. As a result of highly effective leadership, more systematic approaches to self-evaluation, and willingness and commitment of all staff to improve the school further, St Sampson's High School demonstrates a strong capacity for continuous improvement.

HM Inspectors are able to validate almost all aspects of the school's own self-evaluation.

This validation visit found the following key strengths.

- Young people who are responsible, confident and proud of their school.
- Strategies to support and encourage young people to improve their literacy through reading.
- A stimulating environment for learning which offers outstanding facilities and where all staff play a key role in supporting learners.

- Partnership working with outside agencies which broadens the rich range of experiences for learners.
- The strong leadership for change demonstrated by the headteacher and her senior colleagues which is bringing about high standards in learning and teaching.

We discussed with staff and the Education Department how they might continue to improve the school. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to raise the attainment of all young people.
- Continue to review the arrangements for meeting the needs of all learners.
- Seek the views of stakeholders to help inform further school improvements.

Here are the evaluations for St Sampson’s High School.

Improvements in performance	good
Learners’ experiences	good
Teaching for effective learning	very good
Meeting learning needs	good
Improvement through self-evaluation	good
Leadership of improvement and change	very good

What happens at the end of the validation?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school’s self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this validation. As part of its arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of education, the Education Department will inform parents about the school’s progress.

Gary Johnstone
HM Inspector

If you would like to receive this letter in a different format, for example, in a translation please contact the administration team on the telephone number which appears at the bottom of the first page of this report.

If you want to give us feedback or make a complaint about our work, please contact us by telephone on 0141 282 5000, or e-mail: complaints@educationscotland.gsi.gov.uk or write to us addressing your letter to the Complaints Manager, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston EH54 6GA.

Appendix 1

<p>Excellent</p> <p>6</p>	<p>Outstanding or sector leading An evaluation of excellent applies to provision which is sector leading. Pupils' experiences and achievements are of a very high quality. An evaluation of excellent represents an outstanding standard of provision which exemplifies very best practice and is worth disseminating beyond the school. It implies that very high levels of performance are sustainable and will be maintained.</p>
<p>Very Good</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Major strengths An evaluation of very good applies to provision characterised by major strengths. There are very few areas for improvement and any that do exist do not significantly diminish pupils' experiences. Whilst an evaluation of very good represents a high standard of provision, it is a standard that should be achievable by all. It implies that it is fully appropriate to continue to make provision without significant adjustment. However, there is an expectation that the school will take opportunities to improve and strive to raise performance to excellent.</p>
<p>Good</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Important strengths with areas for improvement An evaluation of good applies to provision characterised by important strengths which, taken together, clearly outweigh any areas for improvement. An evaluation of good represents a standard of provision in which the strengths have a significantly positive impact. However, the quality of pupils' experiences is diminished in some way by aspects in which improvement is required. It implies that the school should seek to improve further the areas of important strength, but take action to address the areas for improvement.</p>
<p>Satisfactory</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Strengths just outweigh weaknesses An evaluation of satisfactory applies to provision characterised by strengths which just outweigh weaknesses. An evaluation of satisfactory indicates that pupils have access to a basic level of provision. It represents a standard where the strengths have a positive impact on pupils' experiences. However, while the weaknesses are not important enough to have a substantially adverse impact, they do constrain the overall quality of pupils' experiences. It implies that the school should take action to address areas of weakness by building on its strengths.</p>
<p>Weak</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Important weaknesses An evaluation of weak applies to provision which has some strengths, but where there are important weaknesses. In general, an evaluation of weak may be arrived at in a number of circumstances. While there may be some strength, important weaknesses will, either individually or collectively, be sufficient to diminish pupils' experiences in substantial ways. It implies the need for prompt, structured and planned action on the part of the school.</p>
<p>Unsatisfactory</p> <p>1</p>	<p>An evaluation of unsatisfactory applies when there are major weaknesses in provision requiring immediate remedial action. Pupils' experiences are at risk in significant respects. In almost all cases, staff responsible for provision evaluated as unsatisfactory will require support from senior managers in planning and carrying out the necessary actions to effect improvement. This may involve working alongside other staff or agencies in or beyond the school.</p>