

Stowupland High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124853
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	359795
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Ian Seath 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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	670
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Gallagher
Headteacher	Karen Grimes
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2007
School address	Church Road Stowupland, Stowmarket IP14 4BQ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 34 classes and visited a number of others to investigate themes so that 40 teachers were seen in total. Meetings were held with staff, governors, students, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation and students' work. Inspectors received 79 completed questionnaires from parents and carers

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas

- The extent to which the school has recognised and tackled below average progress and standards seen in 2009-10.
- How well the school is tackling the weaker performance of boys seen in previous years.
- Why students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make better progress than their peers.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average secondary and serves a mainly rural catchment. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low, as is the proportion that is of minority ethnic heritage. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school is a mathematics and information and communication technology specialist college and has Healthy School status and the Sportsmark award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school which, despite a dip in results in 2009-10, is beginning to improve. This is because many of the strategies and changes introduced as a result of this decline are beginning to have an effect. The headteacher and her staff are working hard to ensure that the momentum of improvement is maintained.

Teaching and learning and the curriculum are satisfactory. Students benefit from good collaboration with other educational providers in the area that extends the curriculum, but basic skills of literacy and numeracy do not always receive sufficient focus across other subjects. The school is at the heart of its community and is well-regarded and supported by both parents and carers and students. Care, guidance and support are good, a point echoed by the responses seen in parental and student questionnaires. This has enabled students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make good progress. The achievement of students as a whole, however, is satisfactory. Differences between the attainment and progress of boys and girls exist, but the gap is closing and currently less than that seen nationally. Students' behaviour is good: the number of exclusions is very low. Attendance is high.

The school is currently demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to improve as standards begin to rise. The improvement of teaching and learning has been slow although a recent renewed emphasis is beginning to change this. The school recognises that the evaluation of learning and standards in class is underdeveloped and that this has made it difficult to ensure that students of all abilities, especially the most able, are sufficiently challenged.

Self-evaluation is satisfactory and leaders and managers have a clear view of what needs to be done to improve further. They now have a good understanding of the issues that led to the decline of 2009-10 and have put in place many changes to address them. Governors give good support and have ensured that statutory requirements are met. However their monitoring of progress towards targets is insufficiently well-developed and this has meant the challenge they provide to weak performance has not always been effective.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Within 12 months, improve teaching and learning so that a majority classes are good or better and standards continue to rise by:
 - ensuring that the lesson observation system accurately monitors standards and learning in lessons

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- ensuring that this information is used in all classes to enable students of all abilities, especially the most able, to be challenged effectively
- improving the consistency of the marking of written work.
- Quicken progress in literacy and numeracy so that GCSE results rise in both 2011 and 2012, by ensuring that subjects other than English and mathematics are instrumental in helping to drive up standards in those subjects.
- Within 6 months, improve governance by:
 - ensuring that the governing body has a full complement
 - ensuring that governors are more familiar with national and local school performance data so that they are able to challenge the school more effectively
 - devising and implementing systems to enable governors to better monitor progress towards targets, including those for teaching and learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students enter the school with prior attainment that is around the national average. In recent years they have made progress that has been satisfactory but this declined markedly in 2009-10, representing underachievement for a significant number of students. In 2010, this decline led to standards slipping below national averages and to boys reaching standards well below those of girls. The proportion of students gaining the highest GCSE grades was below the national average.

The school has worked hard to understand the issues which caused this decline, and as a result has now implemented many changes. These are beginning to have an effect on standards which have started to rise. The school's own data indicate that the current Year 11 pupils are on track to raise standards in key aspects of attainment, and this improvement was confirmed by classroom observations. Early indications are that historical differences between the attainment of boys and girls are declining and the gap is closing. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress that is at least as good as their peers and often better because they receive good challenge and support. Attendance is well above the national average because of the well-developed links between parents and carers and the school.

In lessons, students demonstrate mostly satisfactory progress although inspectors observed some classes where progress was better than this. Behaviour in class is good because students readily work collaboratively when they are given the opportunity to do so. Many develop skills of independent learning when the lesson allows. However where lessons are dominated by teacher talk or presentation they get insufficient opportunity to use these skills. Pupils' sound literacy and numeracy are not always demonstrated across a range of contexts, because opportunities to develop cross-curricular skills are often missed.

Students understand the features of a healthy lifestyle and want to improve their health. Students benefit from the healthy meals provided by the school's canteen. Many participate in a wide range of sporting activities. Students feel safe in school, and parents and carers agree. Students are taught about safety through the curriculum and understand what constitutes an unsafe situation or environment.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and there is adequate use of a range of teaching resources including good visual presentation in most lessons. Pupils are generally engaged by their work, but in some lessons more able students are not sufficiently challenged by the use of extended activities, feedback through marking, or new horizons. The school has developed a shared view of lesson planning across subject areas, but this is often not well-matched to the varied individual students' needs across the ability range. Good lessons are characterised by pupils' self and peer assessment in well-managed sessions with good monitoring of learning and support. These develop pupils' capacity for extended thinking, numeracy and writing skills.

The school has rightly placed a renewed emphasis on the use of assessment to support learning following the dip in performance seen in 2009-10. It now has an accurate view of how students are progressing. However the extent to which this is used to structure classroom activities is too variable across subjects. This variability extends to the quality of marking for homework and other written work. For example next steps for improvement are not systematically given in feedback.

Some students at Key Stage 4 benefit from highly personalised learning programmes that are offered with a range of providers, including nearby further education colleges. Students can now undertake a Diploma course or a young apprenticeship. A Year 9

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foundation learning programme effectively supports those who enter the school with low prior attainment. Changes to the school day have resulted in more opportunities for students to engage in an extensive range of enrichment activities and participation is good. Cross-curricular provision for literacy and numeracy is insufficiently well-developed across subjects other than English and mathematics. Provision to stretch and challenge the most able is also underdeveloped.

Clearly targeted support leads to good progress for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language, and students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Students' progress is monitored systematically and regularly. Challenging targets are set for most, and this helps to improve attainment. Students know what their targets are and in most cases they know what they have to do to improve. Transition arrangements from middle school are generally good with a clear focus on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable students. Students are well guided through individual interviews for options at Key Stage 4. The school provides a welcoming learning environment for all groups of students. Sixth form mentors effectively support students in Years 9 and 10.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. In recent years, staffing turbulence has deflected from the school improvement process. However, following the declines seen in 2009-10, the headteacher and her colleagues have capably provided a direction for improvement with early signs that standards are rising as a result and gaps between different groups are starting to close. Middle managers, some of whom are new in post, are providing energetic and effective support to this process. Staff feel positive and well-supported. They are fully committed to ensuring equal opportunities for students.

The school is rightly placing an emphasis on the development of teaching and learning. This has resulted in some improvements, but despite these teaching overall remains satisfactory as it was at the last inspection. The school's lesson observation system is used well to identify issues around classroom practice. However the extent to which it also identifies levels of learning and standards in class is underdeveloped. Consequently it is difficult for the school to identify areas where teaching is insufficiently challenging or whether the most able are being effectively stimulated to achieve their best. The school recognises this is currently holding back further improvement. Good practice in teaching and learning is starting to be identified and shared, but strengths remain inconsistent across subject areas. For example, planning to ensure that students of all abilities are

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suitably challenged is too variable. The school's specialism of information and communications technology has had a significant impact on classroom practice in this area and its use is now widespread. However the impact on mathematics has been less pronounced.

Governors bring many strengths to the school but their workload has increased because there are currently too many vacancies on the governing body. Governors regularly receive detailed and accurate reports and updates from the Headteacher and other staff. However, they are too dependent on them which means that they are rarely able to challenge or make comparisons with local or national statistics. Whilst suitable targets and action plans are agreed, the systematic monitoring of progress towards them by governors is underdeveloped.

Questionnaire responses indicate that the school has a positive relationship with the very supportive parents and carers who are keen to work with the school. Students benefit from good partnership working with nearby schools, further education colleges, and agencies to support students and families. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The school adopts recommended good practice in all aspects of its safeguarding duties. The school's new director of inclusive learning works closely with key agencies to strengthen arrangements for ensuring students' safety and for reacting promptly to concerns raised by school staff. Staff training in child protection is good. Community cohesion is promoted actively within the school and locally. Its promotion in a wider context is more limited, and this has some impact on restricting students' understanding of multicultural society but the school has appropriate plans to develop this.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Sixth form

Most students attain grades that are consistent with their prior attainment. Overall success rates for advanced level students are in line with national averages. Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory with good aspects especially in drama, media studies and psychology. Attendance is outstanding. Progress within lessons is generally satisfactory, and students say that they feel safe. Most students progress to higher education.

Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of questions to challenge the most able students and use small group work effectively to engage students in learning. In the weaker lessons, teachers talk for too long and do not allow students sufficient opportunity to demonstrate and test their learning. In these sessions, teachers do not always plan effectively to meet the individual needs of the most able students, though the use of assessment to plan learning is usually satisfactory. Students receive appropriate verbal and written feedback to help them improve their work. Students know what their target grades are and they receive good support and encouragement to attain or exceed these grades.

The sixth form offers a satisfactory range of subjects. The school has arranged for students to study advanced level subjects at neighbouring schools. A satisfactory range of enrichment opportunities is offered on Wednesday afternoon, although many sixth form students are unable to attend these activities as they are timetabled for sessions at that time. Managers understand the main strengths and areas for improvement. They use data well to monitor the performance of individual subjects.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who returned completed questionnaires were positive about the school and their children's experiences, and inspectors agreed with these responses. The questions with the highest negative responses were around the progress made by their child and the quality of teaching. A small number of responses were very positive about support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, reflecting inspection findings.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stowupland High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 79 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 670 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	39	43	54	4	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	36	46	41	52	2	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	38	48	35	44	6	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	47	30	38	12	15	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	29	37	41	52	9	11	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	38	43	54	6	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	23	56	71	2	3	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	38	48	31	39	3	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	33	42	38	48	7	9	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	33	43	54	4	5	2	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	33	45	57	5	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	34	43	40	51	3	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	39	49	32	41	8	10	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 February 2011

Dear Students,

Inspection of Stowupland High School, Stowmarket, IP14 4BQ

As you will know, I spent two days in your school earlier this week with four other inspectors. We met with many of you, talked with your teachers, looked at your work and enjoyed your classes. Throughout this you were helpful, courteous and well-mannered. I would like to thank you for this - your school has a number of strengths and one of them is you.

We found that your school is satisfactory, and although exam results dipped last year standards are now improving and on track to be at least where they were the year before, or better. This is because the headteacher and her team are working hard to improve the school in a number of areas. We agreed with the ways they are doing this but there are still areas that are either work in progress or which we have asked the school to improve further.

We agree with the headteacher that the most important area to work on is teaching and learning. The school has already started with this, and we have given them some further points to work on. You will be noticing that lessons will be challenging you more, that there will be better communication between subjects so that literacy and numeracy are present in all that you do, and that marking should become more consistent between subjects.

We have also asked that the good support that governors give to the school is matched by the challenge they give, and that the ways that the school makes progress towards targets is more regularly checked.

Remember though that these improvements can only do so much and the rest is down to you. You can help with the process by asking if you are unsure in class, by making sure that you know what you need to do to improve, and by keeping up the excellent attendance that you have.

Once again, thank you and I wish you well.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath HMI

Her Majesty's Inspector

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