

The Sandon School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115379
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357745
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Stephen Abbott HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1252
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	190
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Cox
Headteacher	Jonathan Wincott
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2007
School address	Molrams Lane Sandon, Chelmsford CM2 7AQ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed parts of 42 lessons, involving 42 teachers. They observed the school's work and looked at various documents, including the school improvement plan, selected policies and record books, minutes of the governing body meetings and records of vetting procedures. Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body, teachers, teaching and learning support assistants, other members of staff, and various groups of pupils. Inspectors also took into consideration questionnaires completed by 416 parents and carers, 57 staff and 155 students.

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

- Do students make better progress in lessons than suggested by recent results?
- How well do teachers make use of assessment data to plan for the range of needs in each class and to adapt their teaching during lessons?
- How well does the curriculum meets the needs of the most-able students in Key Stage 4 and those with below-average prior attainment?
- Can the school explain the apparently slow progress of some students with special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- How well do leaders and managers take account of student progress data in evaluating provision and identifying priorities for school improvement?

Information about the school

The Sandon School is larger than average secondary school with specialist status for mathematics and computing. Most pupils are White British. Few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few students are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. Just over half of these students have behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. Fewer students than average have a statement of special educational needs.

The school holds the Artsmark, Sportsmark, Football Association charter mark, BECTA ICT mark, Investors in People, International School award and Healthy Schools status.

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?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

This is a good school. It has some outstanding features and is deservedly popular with parents and carers. Senior leaders and the outstanding governing body share a clear vision for the school. This is summarised in the school's aims as 'achievement for every learner', but it is widely interpreted to include students' personal development as well as their academic success. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are above average and students make good academic progress. The provision of care, guidance and support and the school's partnership with parents and carers are outstanding. As a result, students' social and moral development and their contributions to the school and wider community are outstanding. The very good relationships among students and between students and adults result in a harmonious school community, in which students feel exceptionally safe and show excellent regard for each other.

The school has a good system for recording students' targets and current attainment levels in each subject, and this tracking data is increasingly used by heads of year to identify those at risk of underachievement. Support is then tailored to meet students' needs, including catch-up programmes, extra revision sessions and one-to-one tutoring. The school has a good track record of forecasting its examination results, and is projecting further improvements in attainment and progress for 2011.

The school is innovative in the way it has developed support for students and their families. For example, the school has trained 180 peer mentors in a variety of specialised roles to provide support for other students. Many who receive mentoring later go on to become mentors themselves. Students who need support in getting their views heard, for example in talking to their parents or carers, or to adults in authority, can call upon a young person's advocate.

In the last two years, the school has addressed two significant issues. Senior leaders instigated an action plan to improve progress in English. This drew on local authority support to improve teaching and use of assessment in English lessons. Teachers worked together to modify their teaching programmes and to share good practice. As a result, students now make good progress in English. Senior leaders have also amended the alternative education programme, which mainly caters for the needs of students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and other special educational needs. Students in this group had previously spent one day a week in college and another on work experience, which resulted in fewer accredited qualifications than usual. The revised programme places less emphasis on work experience, includes more core and vocational subjects and ensures that the college courses lead to recognised qualifications. As the changes work through, qualification levels are improving. Along with the improvements in care, guidance and support since the last inspection, these changes demonstrate the school's good capacity for making improvements.

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Senior leaders and the governing body monitor the school's work very thoroughly. The monitoring includes regular and accurate lesson observations. The inspection findings are mainly consistent with the school's self-evaluation. Teaching and students' learning and progress are both good, but the use of assessment to support learning is satisfactory. Students' work is usually marked regularly, but the quality of feedback is variable. Many teachers are at an early stage of using student tracking data to guide their planning. In a few cases, the highest attaining students are left with nothing to do if they finish early. The main difference between good and satisfactory lessons is teachers' use of assessment to focus and, where necessary, to adapt their subsequent teaching. Two contributory factors are the extent to which teachers monitor students as they work and the quality of questioning. In the best cases, teachers include activities where students are working independently, giving themselves time to move around the class and check on progress. They also ensure that all students have the opportunity to answer questions. However, some teachers monitor and question less effectively. By only taking answers from those with their hands up, they allow some students to remain passive.

The effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory because outcomes are satisfactory. The school's self-evaluation of the sixth form is too generous because it takes too little account of students' progress within subjects, which is mainly satisfactory. While sixth formers gain an above-average number of qualifications, in recent years they have done so with below average grades. However, there is an improving trend and standards are broadly average for current students. Senior leaders recognise that some students in the past have been encouraged to take on too many subjects and are reviewing their advice and guidance accordingly. They also accept that the curriculum includes too few vocational options. However, they have not collated

- the findings from sixth form lesson observations well enough to identify why sixth-form students' progress is only satisfactory. One important reason is that too many lessons involve the teacher giving information rather than encouraging independent learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching in all key stages by:
 - improving teachers' use of tracking data and other assessment information, including targets set during marking, to plan lesson activities that better meet individual students' needs
 - improve the use of assessment during lessons, by sharing good practice in questioning and the monitoring of students as they work
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment to focus, and if necessary, reshape subsequent teaching
 - ensuring that lesson observations and other monitoring procedures include an explicit evaluation of the use of assessment to support learning.
- Raise achievement in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that lessons develop students' skills as independent learners
 - collating the findings of sixth form lesson observations to identify further ways of improving students' progress

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- encouraging students to aim for high standards in each subject by not overloading their programmes
- increasing the range of courses to include more vocational qualifications.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In a large majority of lessons across all subjects, students enjoy learning and apply themselves well, learning skills through practice. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because learning support is well organised and effective. For example, it includes mentoring for students to improve their note taking and revision skills. In the best lessons, students increase their understanding through a variety of activities, including discussion, problem solving and well targeted questioning. The pace of learning drops a little in some lessons, because students who finish early are not offered enough extension work. The work in students' books over the last year shows good progress over time.

Attainment on entry to the school is above average. In recent years, attainment has also been above average at the end of Key Stage 4, except in English, where standards are now improving rapidly. Overall attainment also shows an improving trend, albeit less spectacular. Last year, the proportion of students gaining five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was well above the national figure and the attainment gap closed between boys and girls. Achievement is good in the specialist areas of mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT).

Inspectors investigated why some students with special educational needs and/or disabilities had low scores on value-added measures of progress. They found that the apparent underachievement mainly affected students on the alternative programme, many of whom had behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Until this year, students on the alternative programme were restricted to four or five qualifications, whereas the value-added measures are based on eight subjects. These students' scores were therefore depressed, and this also reduced the overall value-added score for the school. In fact, students on the alternative programme make good progress and are well prepared for the future. Last year, every student progressed to further education, employment or training.

Students understand the value of healthy eating and exercise. The take-up of school meals is high and many students take part in extra-curricular sports. Students feel exceptionally safe in the school because they have full confidence that any issues they raise will be taken seriously. Students are exceptionally supportive to each other, so bullying is rare and there have been no recent racist incidents. Students understand and accept the behaviour policy and exclusions are low. Behaviour is judged good, rather than outstanding, because students are sometimes rather passive in lessons.

Students value their community and an unusually high proportion take on responsibilities, for example in charitable and community work, as peer mentors within school and as subject ambassadors during visits to primary schools and during information evenings for students and their parents or carers. The enthusiastic school and year councils have a very positive impact. Students make good use of their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. They develop other skills valued by employers through work experience and enterprise days. As a result, nearly all school leavers progress to education, employment or training.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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?

Students experience a range of teaching styles. The most common involves teacher instruction or demonstration, followed by written work by students. Students are engaged through questioning and independent work. The best lessons feature a wider range of activities, such as giving presentations, discussing ideas with other students, practical activities and self-assessment exercises. Despite some unevenness in assessment, most students feel that they know how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

The broad and balanced curriculum meets students' needs well. Since the last inspection, the range of vocational options has expanded in Key Stage 4 and is due to expand in the sixth form. The alternative programme now allows students to access a suitable range of qualifications. The school's specialism is evident in the well designed virtual learning environment, which allows students and parents to access the school's intranet from home. There is a strong ICT programme and the provision of statistics and additional mathematics courses for the highest attaining students. Personal, social and health education is enriched by the involvement of outside speakers, such as the doctor and police officer who talked about drugs during the inspection. Students benefit from many extra-curricular activities, which enjoy a high uptake.

The outstanding care guidance and support is evident in many ways. There are effective programmes to ensure good attendance and behaviour. A sensitive and responsive induction programme includes early contact with students who have special educational

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needs and/or disabilities, and their families. A summer school is run for gifted and talented students. The school has very effective strategies for personal support, including regular liaison with care agencies. All of the students spoken to by inspectors spoke highly of the support the school provides.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and the governing body provide a very clear vision of achievement for all based on a strong all-round education. Staff, students and parents and carers all hold the leadership in high esteem. The school improvement plan has clear objectives and explains how they are to be achieved. Middle leaders are becoming increasingly proficient in monitoring the quality of provision and students' progress.

Clear lines of accountability have been established through the performance management process which link to school priorities and professional development. Members of the governing body are exceptionally well informed about the school and hold the leadership to account very well through their insightful questions. They are extremely well organised and thorough in their approach. They make regular visits to observe the school and receive reports from a wide variety of staff. They are proactive in seeking new members to maintain and improve their collective expertise. The school has well-run financial systems and provides good value for money.

The school works well with external partners to improve its provision and to benefit students. Examples include its involvement in teacher training and its collaborative professional development work with other local schools and the local authority. Outreach work involves a range of departments and the sports partnership is well developed. Safeguarding procedures are very well established, with meticulous attention to detail. The very thorough risk assessments go beyond minimum requirements.

Inclusive practice and equal opportunities are well promoted and statutory policies and procedures are in place and reviewed appropriately. Students from different ethnic backgrounds, and those with disabilities, are well integrated into the school community. The school understands its ethnic and socio-economic setting but does not have a full picture of students' religious affiliations. The school has satisfactory plans to promote community cohesion, but has not evaluated the impact of its work to date.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
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	2

Sixth form

The sixth form is oversubscribed and most students complete their courses. Most leavers progress to higher education. Students' personal development is very good, particularly their contribution to the school and wider community. Attainment in most sixth form subjects has been below average in recent years, but with an improving trend. Students' progress was below average in 2010, but achievement is now satisfactory and current attainment is average. For this reason, outcomes are judged satisfactory.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form has similar strengths and weaknesses as for the school as a whole. In the most effective lessons, skilled questioning and assessment, and opportunities for group work, are used very well. However, too many lessons are based on teachers giving information rather than developing the students' independent learning skills. Some opportunities are missed to use assessment to enhance learning. The sixth form curriculum offers a broad choice of Level 3 courses, mainly at A level. The decision to focus on advanced level courses is reasonable in view of the ready availability of Level 2 courses in nearby schools and colleges. In response to student consultation, the school is enhancing its curriculum enrichment programme. It also plans to introduce more advanced vocational courses.

The sixth form leadership team has a satisfactory understanding of current strengths and weaknesses and a clear vision of how post-16 provision should develop. Care, and support are strong, and feature an increasingly rigorous approach to academic monitoring and intervention. Planning to raise students' achievement includes appropriate revisions to the curriculum and associated guidance but does not place enough emphasis on improving teaching.

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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 overwhelming majority of parents and carers are very positive about the school. The levels of agreement with the statements in the questionnaire are all above average. Agreement is particularly strong particularly in relation to the statements on enjoyment, keeping children safe, the quality of teaching, helping parents and carers to support learning, and the leadership of the school.

Several parents and carers made comments, some positive and some negative. Six commented on lack of homework in some classes, and one of too much. Inspectors agree that there is some inconsistency in this respect. Generally, negative comments, such as 'communication with parents could be improved' were balanced by an opposite point of view, such as 'communication with parents is particularly good'. Respect for the headteacher is evident. One parent wrote, 'The headteacher's influence is profound and produces a school which involves staff and parents and students.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Sandon 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 416 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1252 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	160	39	229	55	22	5	2	0
The school keeps my child safe	190	46	220	53	1	0	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	155	38	233	56	22	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	160	39	229	55	23	6	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	130	31	260	63	14	3	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	125	30	252	61	30	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	130	31	249	60	31	8	1	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)	165	40	213	52	15	4	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	164	40	224	54	20	5	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	138	33	230	56	27	7	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	92	22	252	61	26	6	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	230	56	180	44	3	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	231	56	173	42	5	1	4	1

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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.



4 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Sandon School, Chelmsford, CM2 7AQ

I am writing to tell you the outcome of your school's recent inspection. First, though, on behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you all for the welcome we received and to thank especially those of you who gave up your time to talk to us or to complete our questionnaires.

Your questionnaire responses were very positive. For example, 97% of students said that they felt safe at school, learn a lot in lessons and feel that the headteacher and senior staff do a good job. We were very impressed with how well you get along with each other and with the adults in the school. You make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community.

We judged your school to be good. There are some outstanding features, such as the care, guidance and support and the way the school works with parents and carers. The school is well led by the headteacher, governing body and senior leaders and the staff are highly committed. The school provides a very good range of activities, especially in music and sports. Teaching and learning support are good and, as a result, those of you in Key Stages 3 and 4 make good progress and your examination results are above average. Progress has not been as good in the sixth form because sixth formers are not pushed enough to develop their independent learning skills. As a result, the sixth form is judged to be satisfactory.

Inspectors always make recommendations. We have asked the school to:

- strengthen the quality of teaching by making sure that the work meets each students' needs and that teachers check your progress during the lesson
- raise achievement in the sixth form
- use lesson observations and other monitoring procedures to make sure these improvements happen.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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