

Stowmarket High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124818
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	380993
Inspection dates	23–24 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	994
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Douglas Chivers
Headteacher	Keith Penn
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2009
School address	Onehouse Road Stowmarket IP14 1QR
Telephone number	01449 613541
Fax number	01449 770436
Email address	enquiries@stowmarkethigh.suffolk.sch.uk

Age group	13–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The number of lessons observed was 43 and 43 teachers were seen. Meetings were held with groups of students, representatives of the governing body and members of staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documents including the school's self-evaluation and questionnaires completed by the students and staff and by 150 parents and carers.

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

- How well teachers use assessment data in planning lessons so that all students are challenged.
- The effectiveness of subject leaders in bringing about improvement.

Information about the school

The number of students on roll is in line with the national average. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free schools is much lower than the national average. This is true also for the proportion of students who are from minority ethnic groups, who speak English as an additional language or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The local authority is consulting on introducing a two-tier system of education in the area, and for the school to take students from the age of eleven.

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****2**

Main findings

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory and that of the sixth form is good. Since the last inspection, in 2009, there has been some variation in the achievements of students in their examinations at the end of Year 11. There was a fall in 2010 but an increase in 2011. The evidence from the inspection is that the improvement in 2011 is being sustained. The progress being made by students is satisfactory and their attainment is broadly average. This is the result of satisfactory teaching. There has been steady improvement in the sixth form, where the students are now making good progress.

The school's leaders have brought about improvement in a number of ways. Some robust actions have been taken to improve provision in mathematics, for example, and the school is also now less reliant on temporary teachers in the subject. The self-evaluation carried out by leaders, is, in the main, thorough and based upon reliable evidence. They are candid in their conclusions and identify clearly what needs to improve. The effectiveness of subject leaders in this work, and in the subsequent follow-up, is generally good, but some improvements are not fully embedded. For example, some recent training for teachers on the use of assessment information has as yet not become securely established in all lessons. However, assessment procedures are now better used to identify which students would benefit from extra help in Year 11. The attendance of students has improved, as has their behaviour in lessons. In addition, there have been improvements in the way in which students, particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are cared for, guided and supported. The school's capacity to improve is good.

Lessons are almost always calm and teachers know their subjects well. Less strong is the effectiveness of their plans to fully challenge the range of abilities in some classes. In a small minority of lessons, the expectations of what students of different abilities can learn, and most often those who have low prior attainment, are only satisfactory. Students' learning is helped by a good curriculum which is well designed to cater for their full range of interests and aspirations. Students say they feel safe at school and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

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.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that information from assessment is used in all lessons to decide what students of different abilities should learn and, in doing so, to raise expectations of what lower attaining students will achieve.
- Ensure, through the monitoring and evaluation of their work, that subject leaders are consistently effective in bringing about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The provisional results of the GCSE and equivalent examinations for 2011 show that students reach average standards. This indicates satisfactory progress, given their broadly average starting points. The proportion of students achieving five or more high grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is in line with national averages, a good improvement on the previous year. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities perform in line with expectations. However, the small number of students with a statement of special educational needs outperformed their targets, which were based upon their previous attainment. These students generally receive good support. Taking the best eight subjects of all students into account, and including English and mathematics, the performance of boys is in line with that of girls. In lessons, students are making satisfactory progress including those from minority ethnic groups.

Students' behaviour in lessons is good, as it is around the school. Students are confident and respectful when speaking with adults. They are keen to learn and are able to benefit well from both independent work and group work. They are adept in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) to further their learning. These attributes, along with their above average attendance and their use of literacy and numeracy skills show they are developing workplace skills well. In a few of the lessons in which teaching was not inspiring, there was some off-task chatting by a few students. Nevertheless, students are sensible and courteous. They say that they enjoy school and feel safe there, and inspectors' observations concur with this. Students have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	3

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

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	
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Lessons are generally well paced; teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and use time well. The use of questions to bring about learning is inconsistent. In some lessons, questions are used well to test understanding so that any misconceptions can be corrected. However, some teachers tend to ask questions only of those confident enough of their learning to volunteer an answer. This allows some of the other students to disengage from the lesson, and also means the teacher is not able to assess the general extent of understanding.

When students are highly challenged and understand well what is expected of them and how to achieve it, they can achieve excellent results. In an outstanding food technology lesson, students were working independently on a challenging task. The teacher had high expectations and students were fully engaged. They responded to the task very well and produced some outstanding designs. This was partly the result of their very accurate evaluations of their work, which led to them improving what they were doing.

The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities. These include a variety of special days with an extra-curricular focus. There is good provision for students who have been identified as gifted and talented. There is also additional support, some taking place early in the day, for students whose literacy skills are relatively weak. Extra-curricular opportunities are good, though the attendance of some students is hampered by after-school travel restrictions.

Students are prepared well for when they join the school in Year 9. Those who apply to join the sixth form are provided with good advice. There are good and effective programmes for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, and they

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

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are increasingly making good progress as a result. Students who have behavioural difficulties, for example, receive effective help partly as a result of good links with professionals from outside the school. The number of incidents of poor behaviour is reducing and the students involved are making good progress with their learning.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders, and those with responsibilities for subject departments, are taking the necessary steps to bring about improvement. While there is still some variability in the leadership of departments, it is, in general, effective and leading to improvements. In some subjects, for example mathematics, there has been rapid development. In a small minority of cases, however, self-evaluation by subject leaders is unrealistic and this reduces the scope for improvement. In these cases, leaders speak highly of provision, but in doing so do not take into account the fact that the impact of the department's work on the learning of students is only satisfactory.

The use of data to check whether students are making sufficient progress has been well evaluated and changes have been introduced to bring about more accuracy. The governing body is knowledgeable about the school and challenges leaders well. It expressed some concerns about the sixth form, for example, and a successful drive to improve it is well underway. The governing body is also well involved in the possible changes to the age range of the school.

The promotion of equality is satisfactory. Effective steps have been taken to improve the learning of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and, as a result, the gaps are reducing between their learning and that of others. There are some differences, however, in the rate of attendance of different groups. The school holds meetings with parents and carers, for example on option choices. Parents and carers do not always see clear advice, however, about how learning can be improved, for instance, through the manner in which students' books are marked. The promotion of community cohesion was identified as an area for improvement in the previous inspection. This is now satisfactory. The school has analysed the nature of its intake and how it reflects the local, national and international communities. An action plan has been established, though leaders have not evaluated its impact. Safeguarding is satisfactory. The statutory requirements are followed, though some aspects of good practice have not been adopted.

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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	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

There has been significant improvement in achievement and other outcomes since the previous inspection. Students' attainment has improved steadily since then. It continues to rise and current attainment is above average, and students are now making good progress. Leaders' evaluation of the quality of provision is accurate. It is used effectively to bring about improvement. As a result, the curriculum has been improved, as has the quality of teaching. Almost all the lessons observed during the inspection were good or outstanding. The care of students has also improved, for example through better academic and personal guidance and frequent monitoring of the progress being made by students who are educated for part of the time at partner institutions. This demonstrates the good quality of leadership and management in the sixth form.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The great majority of parents and carers are approving of the work of the school.

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

The areas which they are least positive about are those to do with how well they are helped to support their children's learning and how well the school helps their children to have a healthy lifestyle. Inspectors investigated these areas and their findings can be seen in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Stowmarket 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 150 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 994 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	29	97	65	4	3	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	37	25	104	69	6	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	56	37	82	55	10	7	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	53	35	90	60	4	3	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	40	27	99	66	4	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	21	86	57	27	18	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	12	94	63	31	21	2	1
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)	50	33	84	56	6	4	3	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	50	33	93	62	3	2	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	15	87	58	20	13	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	11	96	64	16	11	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	29	19	102	68	11	7	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	53	35	86	57	8	5	1	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



25 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Stowmarket High School, Stowmarket, IP14 1QR

Thank you for your help during the inspection. We spoke to a good number of you and we found you to be confident and articulate. You behave well too, lessons are settled and the school is a calm place.

Your school is satisfactory, and it is improving in several important respects. For example, it is working successfully with some students in helping them to improve their behaviour. Attendance is improving. Learning, particularly in mathematics, is improving well. In your learning, you are making satisfactory progress. The quality of teaching is satisfactory, but in some lessons there is not enough challenge for the range of abilities in the class. This is because the data that your teachers have about your strengths and weaknesses are not always used well enough in planning the lessons.

Inspectors found that you enjoy school and feel safe when you are there. You contribute well to the school and the wider community. Your literacy and numeracy skills, and the fact that you work well both independently and in groups, mean that you are being well prepared for future work. The sixth form has improved well since the school was inspected three years ago. It is providing a good standard of education and students are making good progress.

We have asked your school's leaders to:

- Ensure that information from assessments is used more extensively to decide what students of different abilities should learn in lessons and in doing so, to raise expectations of what lower attaining students will achieve.
- Ensure, through the monitoring and evaluation of their work, that subject leaders are consistently effective in bringing about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

I wish you all well for the future. You can help by maintaining your good attendance.

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector

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