

Sandbach School

Crewe Road, Sandbach, Cheshire, CW11 3NS

Inspection dates 22–23 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement requires improvement because it is inconsistent. Students make good progress in some subjects, such as mathematics and history, but weak progress in others, such as science.
- Teachers do not always adjust their lessons to suit the needs and abilities of students. Sometimes there is a lack of challenge for more able students and insufficient support for others. As a result, students do not always make good progress.
- Marking is variable. Mistakes in spelling, for example, are often not corrected and students in some subjects do not receive useful advice on how to improve their work.
- The school has had an over-generous view of its performance. Plans for improvement are not sharply focused on addressing areas for improvement. As a result, the school has not acted swiftly enough to tackle some areas of weakness, such as science.

The school has the following strengths

- The sixth form is good. Students achieve well and they make an excellent contribution to the life of the school.
- Behaviour is good. Students are polite, hard-working and friendly.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is outstanding. Teachers freely give of their time to provide a wealth of interesting opportunities that help to broaden students' horizons and enrich their lives.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 lessons, of which three were joint observations with members of the leadership team. An inspector also observed small groups of students reading.
- Inspectors examined detailed, validated information on students' performance for the academic year 2011/ 2012 and information provided by the school on current learning and progress.
- Meetings were held with members of the governing body, staff and groups of students.
- Inspectors took into account 175 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and considered letters and emails sent to the team during the inspection.
- The inspection team observed the school's work, examined minutes of governing body meetings and considered external evaluations of the school's effectiveness.
- Records relating to attendance and behaviour, the school development plan, information on the quality of teaching and the setting of targets for teachers were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Joan Bonenfant, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Eric Craven	Additional Inspector
Tudor Griffiths	Additional Inspector
Kathleen Harris	Additional Inspector
Mark Shenton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized secondary school for boys, with a sixth form.
- Sandbach became a free school in September 2011, on the same site and with the same staff and students as the predecessor school.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is well below the national average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority, children of parents in the armed forces, and for students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- A number of students attend work-related training away from school, provided through an organisation called 'Changing Education'.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching so that all students make good and better progress in all subjects by:
 - sharing existing good and outstanding practice more effectively
 - ensuring all teachers plan lessons that are suited to the needs and abilities of students, with interesting activities that stretch more able students and support others
 - establishing and rigorously applying a whole school marking policy that helps students to make the next steps in their learning and also supports the development of their literacy skills.
- Raise achievement in science by:
 - strengthening further the leadership of the subject
 - reconsidering how students should be grouped for this subject to make teaching most effective
 - improving the regularity, effectiveness and quality of written and oral feedback to students.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring school self-evaluation is accurate, clearly identifying areas of weakness
 - making sure that the school development plan is sharply focused on areas for improvement
 - establishing more rigorous systems to check that actions to improve the school are having an impact quickly.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In public examinations taken in 2012, students achieved well in some subjects, such as mathematics and history. Students did not perform as well as the school expected in English and achievement in science was weak for most groups of students. As a result, the proportion of students gaining five A* - C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was slightly below the national average.
- Inspection evidence shows, however, that things are getting better. New leadership of science is moving the department forward at a faster pace and this has already had an impact on improving examination performance. A watchful eye is being kept on progress in English to make sure that all students remain on target to achieve at least as well as they should.
- The school has introduced one-to-one tuition and provided extra support to help students known to be eligible for the pupil premium. The school has closed the gap in the achievement of this group of students, and other groups nationally, as these students' scores in English and mathematics are now higher than the national average.
- Procedures to promote literacy across subjects are underdeveloped and those to promote numeracy are non-existent. Students sometimes make grammatical and spelling errors which are not corrected by their teachers. This then leads them to repeat their mistakes. Teachers in mathematics and science feel that sometimes weaknesses in literacy are hampering progress in these subjects because sometimes students have difficulty in understanding questions in examinations.
- The school has recently introduced far more effective systems to track the progress of groups of students. Information provided during the inspection suggests that students supported at school action and school action plus are making reasonable progress. The small numbers of students with a statement of special educational needs or with disabilities generally make good progress.
- A small number of students attend work-related training at places away from school. These students achieve well. They gain useful, practical experience by working in 'real life' settings, such as those provided by links with the local further education specialist college. As a result, most students go on to further study or employment when they leave school.
- Strong, dynamic leadership and good teaching in the sixth form are combining to help students achieve well. Information on students' performance is used very effectively; teachers and students are held to account if they are not achieving as well as they should. A beneficial partnership with the local girls' school is helping to widen the range of courses on offer. Students in the sixth form speak highly of the support they receive from their teachers and of the excellent extra-curricular opportunities on offer.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The majority of lessons observed during the inspection were good and a few were outstanding. Good practice exists in many subjects across the school, with particular strengths in performing arts and humanities. In the best lessons, enthusiastic teaching and a range of exciting activities, stimulate students' imagination and help them to enjoy learning. For example, in one outstanding Year 12 drama lesson, students were totally engrossed in their work and highly focused on performing at their best.
- Teachers set challenging targets for their students. They identify when students are falling behind and offer additional support. Teachers have good subject knowledge. For example, in one Year 7 French lesson, the teacher's passion for the subject was infectious. He provided an excellent model of pronunciation for the students to imitate. As a result, students spoke confidently, enthusiastically and with good accents.
- However, a stubborn core of mediocre teaching is proving an obstacle to students making good progress in a proportion of their lessons. In weaker lessons too much teacher talk dominates the

lesson and students lose interest.

- Teaching in science particularly requires improvement. Recent initiatives to improve the quality of teaching in this subject have failed to have a tangible impact and the majority of science lessons observed during the inspection were not of a good standard.
- The quality of marking and feedback to students is highly inconsistent. Students said that in several subjects their work regularly remains unmarked and inspectors confirmed this when they examined books during the inspection. This leads to repeated errors and misunderstandings on the part of students. Marking is particularly weak in science.
- Teachers do not routinely adjust their lessons to meet the needs and abilities of students. A 'one size fits all' approach leads to a lack of challenge for some able students and confusion for others. Even in some of the better lessons this approach gets in the way of students making outstanding progress.
- Students commented that dull activities, such as copying or 'filling in worksheets', make lessons boring. Almost a fifth of parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire feel that their child is not taught well at the school and almost a third feel that homework is not appropriate.
- Relationships between students and teachers are friendly and allow lessons to proceed without disruption for the most part. Teachers are good role models for their students. They conduct themselves in a professional manner and mutual respect abounds.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Students are proud of their school and are polite and friendly. They show kindness and consideration towards one another. There is a clear system for managing poor behaviour when it occasionally occurs. This has helped to keep the numbers of exclusions low.
- A large majority of parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire feel that the school makes sure its students are well behaved and that their child is well looked after. Students say that bullying sometimes happens but that school staff step in to sort it out.
- Students say that they know they can talk to members of staff if they have a problem. Also, a particular strength of the school, is the support provided by students in Years 11, 12 and 13, to younger boys. As a result, students feel safe in school and this sentiment is echoed by a majority of parents and carers.
- Students say that the use of racist or homophobic language is rare. If it does occur it is frowned on by staff and dealt with successfully. A thorough programme of personal, social and health education prepares students well for the complexities of life in the outside world.
- Attendance was below average last year. Senior leaders have taken robust and successful action to make sure students attend school more regularly. As a result, attendance is now well above average.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher demonstrates a passionate ambition to improve this school. She has shown determination to challenge areas of underperformance. Unfortunately, she has encountered some resistance to change and this has prevented the school from improving at a faster pace.
- The school has not gained an accurate insight into improvements in national standards that have taken place over time. As a result, the school has had an inflated view of its own performance. Self-evaluation is growing increasingly accurate but development plans are not sufficiently focused on areas of weakness. This, together with a lack of rigorous systems to check that actions successfully bring about improvements, has resulted in a lack of urgency in sorting out departments that are underperforming, such as science.
- School leaders have successfully tackled last year's high rate of student absence and have

reduced exclusions. Such improvements demonstrate that the school has the capacity to improve further.

- Through the programme to improve teaching, individuals get support that is tailored to their individual needs. All staff are required to attend extensive training to improve teaching, and senior staff check to make sure that such training is making a difference in the classroom. This is starting to have an impact on improving the quality of teaching but more could be done to share the existing good and outstanding practice more effectively.
- School leaders did not decide to enter students early for GCSE examinations in mathematics and therefore students' achievement was not affected by such a policy.
- Across the school students can choose from a wide range of subjects that meet their needs and interests. The range of after-school activities is an outstanding aspect of the school's work. Students play sports at national and international levels and take part in many visits abroad and to places of cultural interest. This vibrant contribution to students' personal development is well-received by students and parents alike, leading one parent to comment that such exciting opportunities have 'helped both my son and other pupils to engage academically'. Such activities support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which is also good and a strength of the school.
- Students are taught to challenge racism and discrimination of all kinds. The school promotes equality, for example, by ensuring that financial support is provided to some students who, because of their economic circumstances, might not have been able to take part in after-school activities.
- Safeguarding procedures meet requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is knowledgeable and committed to school improvement. Governors now have useful information to show them how the school is performing in relation to other schools and this is helping them to have a more accurate view of the school's performance. Governors and senior leaders use information about students' progress to decide whether teachers should be paid more. Governors also take into account information on the quality of teaching to decide whether teachers should get a pay increase. Governors have managed finances effectively and have made sure that the funds available for the pupil premium have been spent wisely, such as on additional staffing and work-related training. Governors are aware of underperformance in science and have supported the headteacher in challenging the department to improve.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137491
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	400308

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

Type of school	Academy free school
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1217
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Greasby
Principal	Sarah Burns
Date of previous school inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	01270 758870
Fax number	–
Email address	sburns@sandbachschool.org

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