

Stanborough School

Lemsford Lane, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6YR

Inspection dates 11–12 July 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

- Although achievement is improving, it is not yet good. There is too much variation in performance across subjects.
- Teaching is not yet consistently good and not enough is outstanding.
- Some lessons do not fully challenge all students, especially the more able. Not all teachers consistently give students objectives for the lesson that encourage and support them to aim high.
- Marking requires improvement because it does not regularly provide students with enough information on how to improve their work.
- Leaders do not focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on students' learning, when evaluating performance or when observing lessons.
- The good practice that exists is not being shared sufficiently to raise the quality of all teaching to that of the best.

The school has the following strengths

- Standards are rising and achievement in English is good.
- All students attain a wide range of qualifications by the end of Year 11.
- Students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is good because of the well-organised and imaginative curriculum.
- Behaviour is good. Students attend well and feel safe at the academy.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Gaps in achievement between different groups in the academy are closing.
- The sixth form is good. Achievement is rising as a result of better teaching and guidance.

Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Inspectors gathered and evaluated a wide range of evidence of the academy's work. They observed 34 lessons, seven of which were seen jointly with leaders. In addition, inspectors carried out visits to tutor periods and the inclusion unit, and made brief visits to a range of lessons to investigate the quality of lesson objectives.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the academy's checks on its performance, plans for improvement, day-to-day health and safety arrangements, safeguarding measures and policy documents. Inspectors analysed the records of students' rates of progress across the academy. They also looked at the use of the pupil premium funding.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, teachers, other staff and groups of students. They also met with the Chair, Vice-chair and three other members of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors considered the 69 responses from parents on the Parentview website.

Inspection team

Elaine Taylor, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Thomas Campbell	Additional Inspector
Sue Cox	Additional Inspector
Alison Footman	Additional Inspector
Gillian Walley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Stanborough School is larger than average.
- The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language are smaller than average. Fewer students than average are supported through the pupil premium, which is additional funding for students in local authority care, those with a parent in the armed services and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported by school action is below average, as is the proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy offers sixth-form courses in partnership with four other local schools, Bishop's Hatfield Girls, Monks Walk's, Onslow St Audrey's, Sir Frederic Osborn and a local college, Oaklands College. It does not provide any off-site courses for younger students.
- Stanborough School converted to become an academy school on 1 February 2012. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory overall.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the variability in achievement across different subjects and raise the standard of teaching to good or better by making sure that all teachers:
 - plan and adjust work in lessons so that it is at the right level of difficulty for all students
 - set challenging objectives in lessons that encourage students to extend their learning
 - use marking to show students how to improve their work and gain higher grades.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers in driving improvement by:
 - increasing the effectiveness of all subject leaders in improving teaching and students' progress through the sharing of good practice and coaching
 - ensuring that the leaders at all levels consider the impact of teaching on students' progress when evaluating performance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In previous years, students entered the academy having reached standards that were above the national average. This is no longer the case and current students started at a broadly average level. Students make good progress in English and in some other subjects such as modern foreign languages, history and information technology. Progress in others is slower and has not improved sufficiently this year to be judged good. This includes mathematics and science.
- Targets are used to promote and measure students' progress as they move through the academy. These targets are not challenging enough to generate the levels of good progress that are required of all students.
- The academy provides good support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. By carefully diagnosing and targeting this support, these students make good gains in their learning and attainment gaps with other students are narrowing.
- Students whose reading ages are too low receive effective support to improve their skills and reading is encouraged through a range of strategies. The academy uses Year 7 'catch-up' funding effectively to raise literacy and numeracy skills by providing extra staff, one-to-one support and meetings with parents.
- A strong feature of the academy is the commitment to providing courses for a wide range of interests and needs. In 2012, every student finished compulsory schooling with at least five GCSE passes.
- The academy is using the pupil premium funding in a variety of ways that vary according to the needs of students in different year groups. The progress these students make is very carefully monitored every half term and strategies are adjusted as needed. The gaps between their attainment and that of other students in English and mathematics are closing, and currently eligible students in Year 11 are on average just two-thirds of a GCSE grade behind all students nationally.
- Some students are entered early for some GCSE examinations. Those who are successful in gaining the higher grades then concentrate on gaining additional qualifications. This has a beneficial impact on the students' overall performance.
- Students in the sixth form make progress in line with that expected of them given their starting points. The proportion gaining the higher grades in A-level examinations requires improvement. However, as a result of good teaching, students make good progress in lessons and their attainment is improving.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is improving, but is not always good enough to ensure that all students make consistently good progress in all subjects.
- In some lessons that require improvement, teachers do not expect enough of the students. They take insufficient account of the range of abilities in the class and so students, particularly those of higher ability, are not suitably challenged. More-able students are given more work rather

than work that is more challenging.

- In some lessons, teachers express the objectives of the lesson in terms that limit the level of challenge or fail to make clear to students what the highest outcomes would look like. There is some excellent practice in some subjects. For example, in information technology lessons, the language used to describe the objectives made it very clear how students might achieve the highest success.
- In the most successful lessons, teachers direct questions at students which are designed to make them think hard and lead to lively discussions. Students are given opportunities to be creative and to work on interesting topics. They work well in groups and are given many opportunities to discuss and evaluate their own and their classmates' learning. As a result, many are developing very good oral communication skills.
- Additional adults provide very good support for students needing extra help with their work. In the best examples they work collaboratively with the teacher. For example, in an English lesson the lesson plans were shared beforehand so the support could be of a very high standard.
- The quality of teachers' marking varies. Good practice exists, but in some subjects gives too little feedback to students on how to improve their work. Some teachers tolerate poor presentation and incomplete work.
- Teachers are aware of the need to promote students' communication, numeracy and literacy skills when teaching in different subjects. They pay attention to key words specific to each lesson and students are encouraged to read aloud regularly. In science, students are encouraged to reinforce their calculation skills.
- Teaching in the sixth form makes good use of technology to personalise the lessons. Teachers provide regular opportunities for students to be independent in their learning, and they are making good progress as a result.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well around the academy. They are polite and welcoming. In the canteen they show consideration for others by clearing away after their meal, and around the site there is hardly any litter and no damage or graffiti.
- Students feel safe and report that there is hardly any bullying of any kind. They recognise the different forms bullying can take and understand the need to take care with language that could make others feel uncomfortable. They understand the dangers to health of smoking and alcohol, and the social damage misuse can cause.
- When incidents of inappropriate behaviour occur, they are carefully logged and managed well. The inclusion unit supports those who need additional help or an alternative timetable for a variety of reasons. This highly personalised provision is very effective and ensures students have minimum disruption to their learning.
- The number of students who are excluded has fallen dramatically to below the national average.
- Students understand a range of social and moral issues well because of well-planned and interesting tutor sessions.

- Students from different year groups cooperate well with each other. For example, Year 10 students support younger students with their reading.
- Sixth-form students take on a wide range of leadership roles and are very clear about their responsibility to take an active part in the life of the academy and the local community.
- Students attend regularly and are punctual to school and to lessons. The academy has used its funding well to restructure the services that support those who do not attend as regularly as they should. As a result, attendance has risen to the highest ever levels. Sixth-form attendance and punctuality are carefully monitored, especially when students travel to other schools in the consortium.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders in the academy are taking effective action to improve the quality of teaching. Some of the outcomes for students have improved significantly since the academy opened. The overall rate of improvement is not yet good because leaders do not take enough account of the impact of their work on students' achievement when judging the quality.
- Subject leaders meet regularly with senior leaders to discuss the progress being made in their areas of responsibility, but the records of these meetings lack detail, reducing opportunities to check the quality of discussions.
- The academy's systems to monitor the quality of teaching are leading to improvements. There is some variability in the extent to which subject leaders are involved in observing lessons and monitoring learning in their areas. Not all observations or the feedback teachers are given focus on the impact of the teaching on students' progress. As a result, staff training opportunities are not precisely matched to individual needs. Not enough is done to share the good practice that exists.
- Good management of teachers' performance ensures that they are only rewarded for good performance. The proportion of teachers progressing to higher reward bands is in line with the rate of improvement in the academy. A new pay policy has been drawn up in full collaboration with the staff and will be used from September 2013.
- Leaders keep detailed records of the progress individual students and different groups are making. These records have been strengthened this year by increasing the number of occasions when teachers are required to make assessments of students' progress and update them. The way students' progress is reported to parents has also been improved. The analysis of the information allows individual needs to be identified and addressed.
- The curriculum provides a very wide range of opportunities for students to gain useful qualifications. The policy of early entry on GCSE courses allows many to follow interesting courses such as financial management. The range of enrichment opportunities is extensive and makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, students' communication and enterprise skills are developed exceptionally well through participation in an international robotics event.
- The curriculum is adapted well to take account of students' needs and interests, and the strong support for students experiencing difficulties also shows the way the academy actively promotes equality.
- The academy's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is honest and accurate. It provides

leaders and the governing body with good information on what needs to be done next. The development plan correctly identifies the most important priorities and sets out realistic plans to achieve them.

- Parents are very happy with the academy, in particular the new detailed information they receive on their children's progress.
- The sixth form is led well. A detailed understanding of the reasons behind some weaker aspects of achievement has allowed leaders to take remedial action and improvements are evident. For example, the number of students needing to change courses has fallen due to better information and guidance.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors have overseen the conversion to academy status effectively while continuing to challenge and support the school.
- They are rigorous in addressing weaknesses in teachers' performance and can point to examples of where their intervention has had a direct impact on outcomes for students. For example, in music a new appointment has led to a big upsurge in musical activity, especially among boys.
- Careful financial management and good use of the skills governors bring to their role have helped to improve the fabric of the academy, for example by improving the accommodation.
- Governors have been instrumental in forging links with a range of external partners such as the University of Hertfordshire and local sports clubs.
- Governors have conducted a self-review and a skills audit, and have had training to address any weaker areas.
- Regular visits and detailed reports keep governors aware of the day-to-day atmosphere in the academy. They understand the strengths and weaker aspects of the academy's work and plan to be involved in faculty reviews in order to strengthen their ability to influence the rate of improvement.
- The use of the pupil premium money is carefully checked and they have been fully involved in the development of the pay policy.

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	137847
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	402774

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
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	1081
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	175
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matthew Buckley
Headteacher	Peter J Brown
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2009
Telephone number	01707 321755
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