

# Stowmarket High School

Onehouse Road, Stowmarket, IP14 1QR

## Inspection dates

18–19 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
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

- Standards at GCSE fluctuate from year to year. In some subjects, standards are below the national average, consistently so in modern foreign languages, performing arts and business.
- The quality of teaching varies. Teachers' planning does not take enough account of what students already know and can do, particularly in Year 9.
- Students' learning is sometimes too teacher dependent. Good progress in lessons is not always sustained over time because inquiry, initiative and independence are under-developed between Years 9 and 11.
- Not enough students develop their leadership skills in lessons or in contributing to the school as a community. This includes sixth formers.
- Although improved, attendance remains below average.
- Senior leaders have not been effective in spreading the best practice in teaching, including the use of assessment, feedback and marking, beyond the sixth form.
- Monitoring and evaluation is not sufficiently critical to give teachers and faculty leaders clarity about how to improve their work. As a consequence, improvement planning is weak.
- Students' spiritual and cultural development is not promoted well. They are not given enough time for reflection or first-hand experience of cultural activities as part of their studies.
- The roles, responsibilities and expectations of senior leaders are not clear enough for the governing body to hold them to account.

### The school has the following strengths

- Students made good progress in English and mathematics in 2013. Students supported by pupil premium funding and the most able students progressed particularly well.
- Students' conduct around the school is good. Relationships between students and with staff contribute to what students feel is a safe and supportive school where bullying is rare. Exclusions have dropped significantly.
- Students are given good information and guidance about course and career options.
- The curriculum meets the needs of different students well. Vocational provision at the school's Gipping Valley Centre gives students an authentic experience of the workplace.
- Sixth form provision is good. Sixth form students make good progress, attain good grades at A level and are able to continue onto courses and into careers that are well-matched to their attributes and aspirations.
- The quality of faculty leadership has improved since the last inspection.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 42 lessons, of which eight were seen jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors visited a sample of lunchtime activities, and tutor periods, and observed an assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior and faculty leaders, parents and carers, two representatives of the governing body, a representative of the local authority and the headteacher of a local middle school. Telephone discussions were also held with a governor on the teaching and learning committee and with a representative of West Suffolk College.
- Inspectors talked with many students about their learning and life at the school. They held meetings with four groups of students and reviewed their work in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors took account of the 37 questionnaires completed by staff and the 41 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspection team observed the school's work; reviewed current data about students' achievement; examined records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance; and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school's work.
- During this inspection, the inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

## Inspection team

Ian Middleton, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Frances Le Pla

Additional Inspector

Paul O'Shea

Additional Inspector

Christopher Cheswright

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Stowmarket High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are White British. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are well below the national figures.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding to support particular groups of pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and students in local authority care) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Forty four students access off-site provision part-time at West Suffolk College.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- School facilities include the Gipping Valley Centre for vocational courses on the school site, which is also used by a small group of students from Stowupland High School.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that the impact on student's achievement is sustained by making sure that all teachers:
  - assess students' skills, knowledge and understanding in lessons by giving students more opportunities to demonstrate their skills, answer and ask questions, and draw on their experience
  - use information about students, including assessment data, to prepare a range of activities that address their individual needs, interests and capabilities, adapting lessons to take account of students' responses
  - give feedback to students by talking to them about their work in relation to that of high achievers, using marking to record what they are doing well and what they need to improve
  - reflect on their contribution to students' learning and progress, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development when planning, evaluating and sharing their work with other colleagues.
- Raise students' achievement to at least national standards in all subjects by making sure that all teachers:
  - work with primary and middle school teachers so that students start Year 9 able to learn new skills and knowledge pitched at an appropriately challenging level
  - make targets clearer to students and their parents and carers, adjusting them where appropriate so that students capable of higher still examination grades understand how to achieve them
  - learn from schools where students perform highly in their subject; for example, by gaining wider experience of how schools prepare students for examinations
  - are familiar with, and make use of, what subject experts say about the factors that contribute to high standards in their subject.

- Increase students' contribution to learning and preparation for life by:
    - continuing to improve attendance
    - engaging students more actively in lessons, enabling more to develop leadership in lessons
    - teaching students how to develop and apply inquiry skills, initiative and independence
    - giving students more responsibility for the school's organisation and its development.
  
  - Strengthen leadership and management by making sure that senior leaders:
    - are given clearer roles and responsibilities that are explicitly linked to improving students' learning, achievement and well-being, for which they are accountable to the governing body
    - give faculty leaders experience of highly effective monitoring, evaluation, improvement planning and performance management
    - take more account of students' progress over time and their attainment, and best practice in the subject, when evaluating the quality of teaching and when reviewing the work of faculties
    - ensure that feedback given to teachers is sufficiently critical about the things expected of all staff and identifies any missed opportunities to inspire students by teaching more creatively
    - use curriculum initiatives such as the popular 'flexi-days' more strategically to boost students' achievement, participation in learning and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
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## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students join the school in Year 9 having attained below-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics when tested at the end of Key Stage 2. In 2011 and 2013, the proportion of students that attained five or more GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics was broadly average, but it was below average in 2012.
- Taking into account students' previous test results, most students in 2013 made the progress in English and mathematics expected of them between Key Stage 2 and 4. The most able students exceeded expectations. Middle school teacher assessments indicate that students make good progress in Years 7 and 8 before starting at the school.
- Students' work seen in lessons and in discussions with groups of students indicates that their progress quickens in Years 10 and 11. Teaching in Year 9 that takes too little account of what students already know and can do slows their progress and, in some subjects, results in GCSE grades that are too low.
- GCSE results in most subjects fluctuate; no subjects attain standards consistently above those attained nationally. In business studies, modern foreign languages and performing arts subjects, results are consistently below average. There are inconsistencies within subjects; poor performance in core science contrasts with better performance in separate sciences.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress similar to that of their peers. Although courses are generally well matched to their needs and include vocational options they are motivated by, not all teachers or teaching assistants adapt lessons well by preparing activities or support tailored to students' needs.
- Most students taking a work-related option either at school or at West Suffolk College meet the standard expected. Specialist facilities at the school's Gipping Valley Centre give students a clear understanding of workplace skills. This contributes to the low proportion of students that are not in employment, education or training after leaving the school.
- The school does not use early entry to examinations, conscious that students should not settle for lower grades than they might otherwise achieve at 16.
- The school uses its pupil premium funding to help disadvantaged students through additional one-to-one and small-group support in English and mathematics. This had a positive impact on the proportion of eligible students in Year 9 that improved their reading scores and, in Year 11, those that achieved five or more GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics in 2013. In 2012, students known to be eligible for free school meals attained, on average, a grade less than their peers. Although, these students still do less well than their classmates, the attainment gap is much smaller than seen nationally.
- Stronger teaching, students' clear plans for the next stage of their learning and more independent attitudes to learning contribute to good achievement in the sixth form. Although a below-average proportion of students start the sixth form having attained A\* to B GCSE grades, results at A level are above average and many students progress on to university.

- Most parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire consider their children make good progress at the school. Some students do make good progress but inspectors found inconsistencies between the progress made in different years and in different subjects.

**The quality of teaching****requires improvement**

- Not enough teaching is consistently good for students to sustain good progress.
- Where teaching requires improvement, teachers do not use information about students' progress or their wider experiences sufficiently well to prepare activities pitched at different levels. Similarly, students' unexpected responses to teaching does not lead to divergence from the lesson plan often enough to capitalise on what they bring to lessons.
- Because teaching assistants are sometimes too dependent on the teacher, their impact is lessened. Teachers and support staff usually have sufficient information about students; for example, in the form of individual education plans and, more recently, progress data. However, there are generally not enough strategies planned or used as a consequence. In contrast, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, all students made excellent progress due to effective teamwork by the teacher and teaching assistant. They checked students' understanding frequently and adapted their teaching accordingly to create an atmosphere in which staff and students worked energetically and with clear enjoyment.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent. There are some good examples, such as in English and in the sixth form. However, not enough teachers provide comments or examples showing how work can be improved. Students are not always clear about the standard of their work or what they can do independently to follow up teachers' marking or feedback.
- Where students have targets, these are not always as clear as they should be, including to help students to attain the higher grades of which they are capable.
- Where teaching is most effective, lessons have good pace because the sequence of activities is well planned. They are challenging because students' thinking is stimulated through questioning, and are relevant because all students are involved through practical or problem-solving activities linked to their own lives. These were good features of a Year 10 construction lesson seen.
- Most teachers develop students' listening skills and encourage clear and confident speaking. The most effective go further in promoting students' literacy by widening their specialist vocabulary, involving them in wider reading, explaining how to write for different purposes and providing feedback on their grammar, punctuation and spelling whatever the subject. These are more common features of teaching in the sixth form.
- Teachers manage their classrooms well. Relevant displays are used to attract students' interest in the subject. Resources are organised efficiently.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils****requires improvement**

- Students' behaviour in lessons is generally cooperative and compliant. However, in too many lessons, students are dependent on their teacher. Little independent inquiry limits their contribution to discussion or consolidation of learning. This contrasts with their enthusiasm and engagement in lessons that inspire interest, involve decision-making and

individual reflection, common features of learning in the sixth form.

- The level of responsibility taken by students is limited by opportunity in and out of lessons. Students value the opportunities that exist to support other students and work with them, for example on 'flexi-days'. However, there is little presence of students developing their leadership around the school; for example, by organising activities for students new to the school. Some students did not know if a school council existed or how it contributed to the school's development.
- Students behave well around the school at break and lunchtimes. This contributes to students feeling safe at school. A high proportion of parents and carers who completed the questionnaire were unsure about how well the school deals with bullying. Students in all years are aware of different forms of bullying and feel confident that incidents of bullying or harassment are taken seriously by staff. Exclusions have fallen significantly.
- Attendance is improving but was below average in previous years. Students are generally punctual to lessons. Students taking courses at West Suffolk College are well regarded for their attitudes to learning off-site. The students using the school's Gipping Valley Centre gain a good understanding of skills that are valued in the workplace. They show strong determination to do well, take responsibility for their work and respect the advice given to them by adults.

## **The leadership and management**

## **requires improvement**

- Leaders have not yet secured consistently good teaching across different year groups and subjects. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching gives too much emphasis to lessons observed and not enough on the impact of teaching on students' progress over time.
- Staff welcomed their feedback from inspectors but several commented that they were not often challenged about the quality of their teaching or students' achievement. This means that professional development needs are not addressed precisely enough to increase teachers' effectiveness. The most effective teachers do not have enough opportunities to hone their skills by leading professional development.
- The quality of faculty leadership has improved; a key issue at the last inspection. Although still at an early stage, faculty leaders are now more involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of their teams by reviewing students' work, gathering students' views and visiting lessons more frequently. However, senior staff do not provide a strong enough lead on monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning to help faculty leaders maximise their impact.
- The performance management of staff is limited in its effectiveness by monitoring that is predominantly internal and evaluation that is not critical enough. The performance targets set for staff are not precise enough or well informed by subject-specific expertise.
- The headteacher is well respected by students, staff and parents and carers. He is knowledgeable about the school as a result of observing all teaching staff and by getting directly involved in a wide range of the school's work, including a considerable teaching commitment. However, this approach is not sufficiently supported by delegation. The roles and responsibilities of the senior team are not clear enough with regard to improving the quality of provision, raising students' attainment or increasing their well-being.



- Significantly higher standards in 2013, better attendance and lower exclusions indicate that the school has the capacity to improve further. In addition, the achievement of different groups of students is narrowing through judicious use of resources; for example, pupil premium funding. Students receive good information and guidance about course and career options. The high proportion of students that progress into the sixth form benefit from a good quality of post-16 education.
- The curriculum is sufficiently broad to offer students a suitable range of academic and vocational courses. Students receive sound advice about course and career options available at 14, 16 and 18. The school's curriculum 'flexi-days' are popular with students. However, curriculum enrichment activities do not always make explicit enough their purpose in promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Cross-phase work with middle schools does not have a strong enough focus on students' progression between Years 8 and 9 across the curriculum.
- The headteacher is actively working with other schools in the area in preparation for the reorganisation of education into a two-tier structure. The school works in partnership with Stowupland High School and Suffolk West College with regard to vocational provision. Teachers do not have enough opportunities, however, to learn from other schools with a track record of greater success at GCSE.
- The local authority's most recent evaluation of the school is too positive. The evidence gathered by inspectors about teachers' planning for different students' needs, a key issue at the last inspection, does not match that seen during the last local authority visit. Some aspects of the school that require improvement have not been challenged, in particular consistently below-average achievement in particular subjects. The local authority has provided data and behaviour support which has contributed to the decline in exclusions at the school. Some specialist advice that has been provided has proven effective, for example about supporting students with special educational needs. Specialist subject support in English, mathematics and science has been offered, but not taken in the past year. Advice given by the local authority about staffing and safeguarding is well regarded by the school as is the quality of support and training for governors.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body provides a reasonable level of challenge and a good level of support. Effective use of governors' expertise has helped to improve financial management in recent years. Governors know how additional funding is spent and about its impact on students' achievement. Governors ask searching questions about the achievement of students, based on data analysis. However, their monitoring and evaluation of the school is based principally on the information provided by senior leaders. Their direct role in evaluating the quality of provision at the school is at an early stage. The lack of detailed success criteria in the school development plan limits their ability to hold senior leaders to account. Governors understand the procedures for performance management and the structures for improving the quality of teaching. They have established the link between teachers' pay and students' progress. They have had limited impact on encouraging the use of Parent View but successfully promote the engagement of parents and carers through consultation with staff. The governing body ensures that the safeguarding of students complies with national requirements. A new Chair of the Governing Body will shortly be appointed following the retirement of the current Chair.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	124818
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	425330

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	852
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	223
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Douglas Chivers
<b>Headteacher</b>	Keith Penn
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23–24 November 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01449 613541
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