

Selly Oak Trust School

Oak Tree Lane, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6HZ

Inspection dates 19–20 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well. From their starting points, they make good progress both in academic subjects and in their personal development. All groups of students do equally well.
- The sixth form is good. Students leave the school well prepared for the next steps in education and the wider world.
- Skilled teaching and a positive climate for learning in lessons promote students' good achievement.
- The curriculum suits students' needs and interests. An extensive range of enrichment activities enhances learning and broadens students' horizons.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered very well.
- The staff know students well. They provide a good deal of care and guidance for students that support their well-being.
- Attendance rates have risen. The attendance of children who are looked after is excellent.
- Students' behaviour is typically good in lessons and around the school.
- The school is very well led. Leaders have a clear vision for the future and have high expectations. Actions taken have had a positive impact on teaching and achievement and the pace of change is accelerating.
- Arrangements for managing the performance of staff are rigorous and thorough. Developing and improving the quality of teaching is given great emphasis.
- Governance is strong. Governors know the school well. They ask probing and challenging questions of leaders.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always make sure that students are fully challenged throughout lessons.
- The part played by subject leaders in strategic planning and driving improvement is under-developed.
- Not all staff are confident in their own and others' ability to deal with and manage challenging behaviour.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 23 parts of lessons taught by teachers and support staff. Thirteen of the lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed students at break, lunchtime and the end of the day.
- Inspectors held a number of meetings with the school’s senior leaders, other teachers and support staff and four members of the governing body. An inspector spoke to the school improvement partner by telephone. Inspectors met with three groups of students to talk to them about their experiences of school and spoke to other students informally in lessons and around school.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of documents including information about how the school ensures that students are kept safe, records of incidents and information about students’ achievement and the curriculum. They looked at students’ work in books.
- Inspectors took account of parents’ views as expressed in the 30 responses to the on-line survey, Parent View, the school’s most recent survey of parents’ opinions and a telephone call to a parent. The questionnaires returned by 74 members of staff were also considered.

Inspection team

Linda McGill, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Morag Kophamel

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Rowena Green

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Selly Oak is a large secondary special school. All of its students have a statement of special educational needs. Students' needs are wide-ranging and often complex, encompassing moderate learning difficulties, autism, speech and language difficulties and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A small number of students are disabled or have severe learning difficulties.
- Selly Oak is a Trust school and is part of the recently renamed Real Life 4 Me Trust which is a charitable foundation supported by the Midlands Co-operative Society which is a lead partner. Selly Oak is also a member of the 'Oaks Consortium' which is a group of local schools who work together and share expertise.
- Over half of the students are known to be eligible for free school meals and a small number are looked-after children. The school receives funding known as the pupil premium to support the education of these students. The pupil premium is government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those from families in the armed forces and looked-after children.
- The majority of students are White British. The remainder come from a wide range of backgrounds; the largest group comprises those of Pakistani heritage.
- The school has a large sixth form. As part of their time in the sixth form, students complete a short placement at either South Birmingham College or Bourneville College. Selly Oak does not use any alternative providers.
- All members of the senior leadership team are new in post since the school was last inspected. The headteacher took up post in January 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to improve students' learning and progress, ensure that all teaching matches the very best by supporting teachers to:
 - plan and teach lessons that take full account of the capabilities of all students and precisely match their individual needs
 - plan tasks that are appropriately challenging for every student in all parts of the lesson
 - ensure that the resources they and the students will use are always carefully selected and used with precision, so that teaching points are clear.
- Provide further training and guidance for staff so that they:
 - develop their skills and confidence in their own and others' abilities to understand and manage students' complex needs, including challenging behaviour
 - understand that everyone must take responsibility for dealing with challenging behaviour in accordance with the school's policies and systems.
- Strengthen the part that subject leaders play in driving improvements in their areas of responsibility by:
 - helping them to use the outcomes of monitoring activities to highlight where improvements are needed
 - making sure that their subsequent action plans include clear and measurable steps against which progress and success can be measured.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well in both academic and practical subjects, and in their personal development. The proportion of students exceeding the progress expected from their starting points is growing each year in both English and mathematics and is greater than that seen nationally. Students in the sixth form also achieve well. They make good progress, gaining further qualifications and broadening their skills and they leave Selly Oak well prepared for the next steps in their education and the wider world.
- Students often make good progress in lessons, developing their thinking and deepening their understanding as a result of skilled teaching. There are still a few lessons where students do not make as much progress as they should, because the tasks they are given are either not challenging enough or not accurately matched to the precise next steps they need to take.
- The students themselves are keen to learn and to do practical tasks. These attitudes make a positive contribution to their learning.
- The work in students' books and folders confirms that they are making good progress. Clear improvement is evident since the start of this school year. Students are involved in setting targets for their learning and they say that teachers make sure they understand what their next steps should be.
- Students study for a range of qualifications at appropriate levels in English, mathematics and science and in practical and work-related subjects. Typically, students take about eight accredited qualifications. Their attainment, as measured by average points scores, has risen each year since the school's last inspection.
- There are no marked differences in the achievement of different groups of students, including those from minority ethnic groups. Students supported by pupil-premium funding achieve particularly well and some make even better progress than their peers.
- A stronger focus on the importance of reading for pleasure is having a positive impact. Students frequently visit the library at break times and talk positively about the books they have enjoyed and their favourite authors. Specific support for individuals and groups of students has made a substantial difference to the reading ages of some students.
- Students grow in confidence and independence as they progress through the school. They learn the skills and attributes that they need to become effective learners. Students in the sixth form spoke of how staff helped them to learn how to manage their behaviour and improve their concentration. One student spoke with pride about how the staff had helped him to learn to read and write.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good and is leading to the better progress that students are making. Some teaching is outstanding but on the other hand some still requires improvement. Making sure that all teaching is at least good is one of Selly Oak's main priorities.
- A recent focus on questioning skills has had a positive impact on many teachers' practice. Teachers understand the need to allow students time to think about what they have been asked

and to formulate a response. The most skilled teachers build very well on what students say and ask pertinent questions that deepen understanding and move learning on.

- Teachers make sure that students recall and understand what they have learned in previous lessons before moving on to the next topic. In all lessons teachers draw students' attention to important vocabulary and talk about the meaning of unfamiliar words. Students are encouraged to read aloud and to talk about the objectives for the lesson. Clear explanations and demonstrations help students understand what they are expected to do.
- Teachers mark students' work and give them guidance about what to do next, supplementing this with verbal feedback and explanations. Students said that this helped them to remember and to learn.
- Some teachers are skilled at defusing potentially difficult situations. For example, a few students arrived late to two lessons because they had been with adults elsewhere and this interrupted the flow of the activities. In both cases, careful and astute management of the situation meant that all students settled very quickly and learning was not lost.
- In a few lessons, teachers' use of resources was not skilful enough to make sure that all students learned as quickly as they should. For example, in one lesson students were asked to draw shapes accurately, but the teacher drew them freehand and did not make best use of the interactive whiteboard to illustrate exactly what was required.
- There are other occasional weaknesses in teaching such as activities that do not challenge students fully. In addition, tasks are not always adapted precisely enough to match the learning needs of individual students.
- Relationships between teachers, support staff and students are strong and supportive. There is a positive climate in lessons. Staff know the students and their preferred ways of learning very well. They occasionally use gentle humour in lessons and are skilled in using a variety of methods to help students maintain their concentration and independence.
- Teaching assistants generally support the learning of individuals and groups of students very well. On a few occasions, however, they intervene unnecessarily and slow students' progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- During this inspection, students behaved well in lessons and around the school at break and lunch times. Discussions with students and scrutiny of the school's records of incidents confirm that this is typically the case. The parents who responded to the questionnaire and who completed the school's survey had few concerns about behaviour.
- Over time, students develop very positive attitudes to their learning and think carefully about new ideas. In a GCSE English lesson, for example, students made perceptive and mature comments about the feelings of characters in war poems. Many students of all ages work very well together in pairs or small groups, talking about what they are learning and sharing ideas. Students who are more confident with writing scribe willingly for others. Even in lessons where teaching is weaker, students persevere with their tasks and listen carefully.
- Given the range and complexity of students' needs, there are occasional disruptions to lessons. Students reported that this does not happen very frequently and that their own learning is not disrupted by others.

- Students know about different types of bullying including name-calling, racist, homophobic and cyber-bullying. During this inspection, all students attended an assembly about bullying. This was carefully followed up in lessons where students thought about the topic from the perspective of a victim and a perpetrator. Students said that there has been some bullying but not much and that they know who to turn to should they have a problem. They particularly valued the support of the pastoral managers.
- Attendance has risen and persistent absence has reduced as a result of focused action by staff. Looked-after children have especially high attendance.
- Students are given a great deal of support to help them manage their own behaviour and deal with events that may make them angry or frustrated. One group of students said that one of the best things about Selly Oak was attending the anger-management group, because they like the teacher so much. The new systems of rewards and sanctions have been well received by students who understand what is expected and what will happen as a consequence. The staff go to increasing lengths to keep students in school and since the arrival of the senior team the rate of fixed-term exclusions has dropped considerably. Case studies show the marked impact that the school's actions have had on the behaviour and well-being of individual students.
- The positive views of students, parents and leaders about behaviour and the evidence gathered during this inspection were not reflected in some of the questionnaires returned by members of staff. A substantial proportion of the respondents did not feel that behaviour is good or that it is consistently well managed by their colleagues. This matter was discussed at length with senior leaders and governors who recognise that some staff are unhappy with changes that have been made and find the pace of change uncomfortable.

The leadership and management are good

- There are considerable strengths in leadership. The headteacher is a decisive and inspirational leader who is very well supported by all members of the leadership team. Leaders and the governing body are ambitious for the school and are striving for excellence. They are realistic, however, and the school's plan for improvement is based on an accurate evaluation of the current position and sets out clearly what must be done next.
- Arrangements for checking teachers' performance and supporting their professional development are meticulous and thorough. There is a clear and coherent approach to the formal appraisal of the work of teachers and support staff that links closely with the school's priorities. Findings from observations of teachers and support staff at work are used to identify where support is needed both for individuals and groups of staff. The professional development of teachers and support staff is given high importance. This is leading to continuing improvement in the quality of teaching.
- Subject leaders carry out a wide range of activities to check on teaching and learning in their subjects. Their skills in driving improvement are under-developed. Action plans link closely to the school's overall plan but are not always informed by the outcomes of monitoring activities. In addition, the individual plans lack steps against which progress can be measured and some do not make explicit the vision for the subject.
- A good deal of thought has gone into decisions about spending the pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding. Improvements are evident as a result in the achievement and attendance of eligible students.

- The curriculum is suitably broad and there is a good balance between learning important skills in reading, writing, mathematics and science, practical subjects and the skills needed for life in the wider world. Students follow 'pathways' that meet their particular needs. An extensive range of enrichment activities enhances students' experiences a great deal. Staff foster students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. They carefully plan opportunities for promoting this aspect of students' development into every topic studied. The curriculum in the sixth form prepares students very well for their next steps beyond school. Last year, every student went on to further training, education or employment.
- Areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been dealt with successfully. In particular, there is now a coherent strategy to make sure all students make the best possible progress in reading and writing.
- Improvements in students' achievement, the quality of teaching and students' attendance together with the evident strengths in leadership confirm that there is a strong capacity for further improvement.
- The local authority has adopted a 'light touch' approach to the school. Selly Oak works very well with a range of external partners such as health professionals and speech and language services to meet students' needs. The school also benefits from membership of the Oaks Consortium and has close links with other special and mainstream schools. The school improvement partner provides a valuable external evaluation of the impact of initiatives.
- Selly Oak works well with parents and makes sure that parents know what their children are studying and how they are doing as well as providing updates through newsletters. The school's website is very informative.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is strong. Members of the governing body keep a close eye on how well the school is doing and have no qualms about asking challenging questions. The minutes of their meetings show that they do not take information about students' progress or the quality of teaching at face value, but that they seek supporting evidence. They are also fully involved in evaluating performance and determining the next steps. They make sure that money such as pupil premium funding is spent wisely and know exactly what impact it has had on the achievement and well-being of students.
 - The work of the governing body is mapped out across the academic year. The plan makes sure that all statutory requirements, including for safeguarding students, are fully met.
 - The governing body is also critical of its own performance and has carried out an in-depth audit of strengths and weaknesses. Training is sought where needed.
 - Governors ensure that the management of the headteacher's performance is carried out rigorously. They fully understand the link between the evaluation of teachers' performance and how they are rewarded and underperformance tackled. They have given the headteacher good support when difficult decisions have had to be made. The headteacher and senior leaders speak highly of the governing body's contribution to the school.

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	103613
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	427166

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	347
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Mike Reynolds
Headteacher	Chris Field
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2011
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