

# The Sandon School

Molrams Lane, Sandon, Chelmsford, CM2 7AQ

## Inspection dates

17–18 December 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
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 make good progress throughout the school. The proportion who gain five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C is rising, and is above average.
- In mathematics, the proportion of students whose progress is as expected or better is well above average. In English, students' progress is improving and is now close to average.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are supported well and make similar progress to that of other students.
- Students for whom the school receives additional funding make good progress. The gap between their performance and that of other students is narrowing rapidly.
- Teaching is usually good or better, leading to good progress throughout the school.
- In lessons, students are interested in their work, and seldom misbehave.
- Around the school, students' behaviour is excellent, making the school a pleasant place to be.
- The sixth form is good. The school provides an effective study programme for all students. Most students make good progress and standards in AS and A levels are well above average.
- Students of all ages are proud to take on responsibilities. Of particular note is the excellent contribution made by peer mentors to the support of other students.
- Good leadership and management from the headteacher, the senior team and other leaders are improving the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
- The governors are knowledgeable and totally committed to the success of the school. They know their school well, and challenge the headteacher and senior staff to bring about further improvements.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students do not always take sufficient responsibility for their own learning by contributing in class, and by responding to teachers' marking.
- Work in lessons is sometimes too easy for the most-able students.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a total of 45 lessons or parts of lessons, six of which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors examined information on students' progress produced by the academy and compared it with information from similar schools nationally.
- Inspectors talked to students about their work during lessons, and looked at written work in their books.
- The inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and senior leaders, with subject leaders and those responsible for students' well being. They also met with a group of governors and members of the Sandon School Academy Trust. They met with groups of students from the sixth form, from Years 7 to 11, and a group chosen from those who work as peer mentors.
- Inspectors took into account the 102 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 42 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors took into consideration key documentation provided by the academy, including its self-evaluation and policies, minutes of meetings, records of attendance and behaviour, and data relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

David Lewis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Heather Housden

Additional Inspector

John Greevy

Additional Inspector

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Additional Inspector

Joanna Jones

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Sandon School is larger than average. It has specialisms in mathematics and computing.
- The Sandon School converted to become an academy on 1 August 2011. When its predecessor school, The Sandon School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The school is administered by the Sandon School Academy Trust, whose members also make up the governing body.
- Nearly all students are White British, and very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students who are supported through school action is close to the national average, and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school is in receipt of additional government funding, the pupil premium, is well below average. This funding is for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority, and other groups.
- No students are taught off-site.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

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

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that work provides an appropriate level of challenge for all, especially the most able.
- Ensure that students follow the advice they are given by teachers when they mark their work.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the academy with levels of attainment that are close to the national average.
- They make good progress, and the proportion of students in Year 11 who gain at least five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, is above average.
- Progress in mathematics is good. By the end of Year 11 in 2013, four fifths of the students had made at least the nationally expected progress since Year 7, and nearly half had made more than expected progress. Students do not do quite so well in English. However, progress is rising, and school data show that students are on track to do nearly as well as they do in mathematics in 2014.
- Progress in lessons is nearly always good or better, and scrutiny of students' books confirmed the school's view that progress is rapidly improving. The school encourages reading for pleasure and for information, and it is rare for poor literacy skills to be a barrier to learning.
- The school monitors students' progress rigorously, and students of all abilities do well, including the most able. However, not all lessons cater as well as they could for students of differing abilities. In some, the most able have work that is too easy for them and the progress they make is not always as good as it could be.
- In the sixth form, achievement is consistently good, and comparisons of AS examination results with national data show that progress is outstanding in Year 12, and almost as good in Year 13. There are several subjects in which examination results are in the top 25% of schools nationally.
- The needs of disabled students and those who have special educational needs are identified at an early stage, and lead to support that is focused and effective. As a result, such students make progress that is at least as good as that of other students.
- Students who attract additional funding through the pupil premium are supported well academically and their progress is improving. Although the results of these students were about a grade lower in English and mathematics than those of other students in 2013, the gap between their progress and that of other students is narrowing throughout the school. They also participate fully in additional activities, such as visits to cultural activities, and overseas visits.
- Students' literacy and numeracy skills are generally good. From Year 7, students participate in a daily reading scheme, and support is provided using the catch-up funding wherever the need is identified. As a result, students develop the literacy skills they need further up the school, and no-one is held back by poor literacy skills.
- The school enters a group of students for GCSE mathematics in Year 10. These students are chosen on the basis of specific need, and early entry enables them to take courses designed to prepare them for more advanced work in the sixth form. The school monitors their results carefully, and ensures that this practice does not disadvantage them in their future studies or entry to the world of work.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is nearly always good or better because teachers create a very positive climate for learning. As a result, students are interested in their work and try hard to do as well as they can. Teaching assistants play an important part in many lessons, supporting individuals or working with small groups of students.
- In the sixth form, teachers' good subject knowledge and understanding of how older students learn best leads to consistently good learning. In a chemistry lesson in Year 12, for example, a brisk and focused dialogue between students and their teacher helped to develop fluency in the naming of hydrocarbons. Throughout the lesson, the teacher was aware of the students' progress, enabling him to adapt the lesson as necessary to dispel any misunderstandings as they arose.
- Throughout the school, teachers constantly check the progress of their students through their questioning and written assignments. In a science lesson in Year 7, for example, students were working in groups to learn not only about acids and alkalis, but also how experimental work can help scientists to find out important information about the materials they are dealing with. Continuous dialogue with the teacher meant that he was able constantly to adapt the lesson to the needs of individuals.
- The school strongly supports students in the development of reading, writing and communication skills. Development of the appropriate subject vocabulary pervades the work of the school and, in discussion, students say that they enjoy reading.
- Teachers make good use of assessment in order to help students to understand how they are progressing. They help them to understand what they have to do in order to reach the next level or grade, and it is clear that they are largely successful in this because most students are well aware of the level they have reached.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They form good relationships with students, who are not afraid to challenge the teacher with things they do not understand. In the best teaching, the work is varied to meet the needs of all students, including the most able.
- However, where teaching is less good, teachers do not meet the needs of the most able as well as they could because work is too easy.
- Homework is set and marked regularly, and teachers provide comments designed to help students to improve. In the main, students make good use of these comments, but teachers do not check that all students follow the advice they are given.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Students' attitudes to their work and support for the school are good, and often outstanding. They are punctual to school and to lessons, have very positive attitudes to learning, and relationships throughout the school are good.
- Around the school, they have a mature outlook to behaviour, and are unfailingly polite and courteous. They look after the fabric of the building well. This makes the school a harmonious and pleasant place to be and to work.
- In lessons, students are keen to do their best, and confirm that they are confident in asking their teachers for help if they need it. They would not think of allowing oppressive behaviour to have an adverse impact upon their learning.

- In the most effective lessons, students participate in discussions that show a high level of maturity, sharing ideas, and evaluating them.
- Students are keen to take on responsibility, for example, as peer mentors. It is deemed a privilege to be invited to become one of about 200 peer mentors in Years 9 to 13, to undertake the required training, and to be accepted for the role. Peer mentors specialise in a variety of aspects of school life, some of them requiring considerable sensitivity, such as child protection, anger management, and bereavement counselling.
- Students are proud to be members of the sixth form, and take responsibility for aspects of the school's work with younger students. This greatly supports their own personal development. Inspectors agreed with them that the extensive peer mentoring scheme makes a massive contribution not only to the safety, well-being and care of students throughout the school, but also by helping them to cope with difficult, dangerous, or even tragic situations.
- There is very little bullying, and students say that the school deals well with what there is. This is confirmed by scrutiny of school records, which are carefully maintained and give all required information about each incident. The online survey for parents, Parent View, indicates that although many parents do not know about the incidence of bullying in the school, there are very few who believe that it is not well managed.
- Students enjoy coming to school. They feel safe in school, and attendance has risen over the last two years. It is now close to the national average. A small number of students are persistently absent. Teachers and those responsible for pastoral care work well to provide support for such students to help them to overcome their difficulties. Unauthorised absence is falling as a result.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- Leaders and managers work in partnership with the governors to make sure that the school meets the needs of its students well, and to model high professional standards in all that they do. All aspects of the work of the school are monitored rigorously, and there is a constant drive for improvement, reflected in rising standards.
- Senior members of staff with responsibility for managing various aspects of the curriculum receive appropriate training, where needed, and help to promote the school's vision for success. Those responsible for pastoral care are meticulous in ensuring the safety of students and in promoting their personal development.
- The school has formed a partnership arrangement with the local authority, which enables it to draw on high-quality support when needed.
- The school has a culture of improvement, based on rigorous self-evaluation, with a high degree of collaboration between staff, in an environment that caters for each student's needs. All students are supported to give their best, and have equal opportunities to succeed. The school does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.
- The school has excellent procedures for monitoring teaching and for supporting teachers whose work is not yet outstanding. Joint observations in which inspectors and senior staff observed the same lesson confirmed that the school's observations are closely aligned to national standards.

- Discussions with staff at all levels show that programmes for the professional development of staff based on identified needs are greatly appreciated. The school provides good support for those at the start of their careers.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced, and provides interesting opportunities for students. One-to-one support is provided for those who find the work difficult, though the most able are not always challenged to ensure that they manage their own work as well as they could.
- The sixth form curriculum is based on the needs and aspirations of students and includes a good range of AS and A level courses, including mathematics and computing, and a range of visual and performing arts, and media studies. Students confirm that the courses on offer meet their needs well.
- The sixth form makes a big contribution to the work of the school. Sixth form students are highly visible, making the school a pleasant place to be at break and lunchtime. Sixth form students rate the guidance and support they get as excellent, and greatly appreciate the time their teachers devote to providing individual support for those who need it. Through the support they get, they are well prepared for life in the community or in university when they leave the school.
- The school provides a wide range of additional activities to support students' personal and academic development. Visits to cultural and sporting events are very popular, and an excellent range of musical activities, including several choirs, enables students to appreciate the joy of performance and provides for links with the local community.
- The school is totally committed to ensuring the welfare of its students, and especially those who face difficult circumstances. It works closely with outside agencies to promote the well-being of students and their families.
- The school meets all statutory requirements, including in its arrangements for safeguarding of students and for the appointment of staff.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body brings to the school an impressive range of professional expertise. Its members are ambitious for the school, provide challenge and hold the headteacher to account for improvements in everything the school does, and especially in teaching. They undertake training, especially in the interpretation of data, visit the school regularly, and understand well the challenges that face the school in its efforts to improve outcomes still further. Governors oversee arrangements for managing the performance of all staff, including that of the headteacher, and play an important part in working with him in managing situations arising from any underperformance. They are conscious of the need to reflect the effectiveness of teachers when determining their pay. They work with the headteacher to promote partnerships in the community, including links with other schools, local companies and with universities. Links with parents are actively promoted. Astute and rigorous financial management results in a healthy surplus for emergencies. The allocation of the pupil premium is well thought out, and contributes well to improving the progress of eligible students.

## 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>	137240
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	433149

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<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>	1244
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	175
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Cox
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jonathan Wincott
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01245 473611
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