

Sandwell Academy

Halfords Lane, West Bromwich, B71 4LG

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Achievement is outstanding. At GCSE, the proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics is well above the national average.
- Students are taught extremely well by dedicated and enthusiastic teachers who display a passion for their subjects and who are ambitious for students to achieve at the highest level.
- Oral feedback to students on how to improve their work is excellent. However, whilst there is exemplary written feedback, it is not consistent across all subjects.
- Support for disabled students and those with special educational needs, those for whom English is an additional language, and those who are eligible for additional government funding is excellent, enabling them to participate well and realise their full potential.
- Students behave exceptionally well and show high levels of respect for staff and each other. They are immensely proud of the academy and their attitudes to learning are exemplary.
- Students feel very safe at the academy.
- The academy's highly effective curriculum is designed to meet the needs of all students extremely well, and contributes greatly to their outstanding success.
- Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally strong. Students are very appreciative of the wide range of clubs, extra lessons, and educational visits, both at home and abroad.
- The sixth form is outstanding. High-quality teaching and guidance, and strong partnerships with universities, colleges of further education and industry, provide students with excellent opportunities to pursue careers of their choice.
- Through his dedication and pursuit of excellence, the headteacher has inspired outstanding leadership at all levels so that teaching and achievement have improved to the highest standards.
- Governors use their considerable knowledge and experience to support and rigorously challenge the senior leadership team.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 45 lessons, four of which were observed jointly with senior staff. A number of other lessons were visited briefly to sample the quality of marking of students' work and their progress over time.
- Inspectors examined students' books, talked to students about their work and heard them read in lessons. They observed other aspects of the school day, including personal tutorial time, students' behaviour at breakfast and lunchtime, and their arrival and departure from the academy.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and other leaders, and five groups of students. In addition, a discussion took place with five representatives of the governing body, including the Chair.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 107 parents and carers who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire, written and phone communications from parents and carers, and the 60 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- A wide range of documents were reviewed, including the academy's own data on students' recent examination results and current progress, its self-evaluation and development plan, information about the work of the staff linked to performance management and training arrangements, monitoring of teaching, students' behaviour and attendance, the safeguarding of students and governance.

Inspection team

Ann Behan, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Shahnaz Maqsood	Additional Inspector
Michael Rose	Additional Inspector
Helen Owen	Additional Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth Needham	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Sandwell Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well above average. The largest group of these students being of Indian heritage. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is below average. This is additional government funding which, in this academy, provides additional support for looked after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who are supported through school action is well below average. The proportion of students at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- Just below one tenth of students in Year 7 and 8 benefit from the nationally funded catch-up programme, which is for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in reading or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- Part-time vocational courses provided by Sandwell College (Sandwell) and Madeley Academy (Telford) are attended by 49 students.
- The academy works in collaboration with Thomas Telford School (Telford), Madeley Academy (Telford), Bulwell Academy (Nottingham), Hammersmith Academy (London), Walsall Academy (Walsall) and Milton Keynes Academy (Milton Keynes).
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Extend the exemplary marking seen in some subjects to all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students join the academy with broadly average attainment, although this varies from year to year. By the end of Year 11, attainment is well above the national average and in the top 20% compared to similar schools. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, was well above the national average in 2012 and 2013. This reflects outstanding progress.
- In 2012 and 2013, the proportion of students making, and exceeding, expected levels of progress in mathematics was well above the national average and represents outstanding progress. Current assessment information shows that this is set to continue.
- There is a similar picture in English for expected levels of progress. However, the proportion of students exceeding expected levels of progress in English has not been as strong. The academy has put in place a number of support strategies, including one-to-one teaching and additional lessons, and current assessment information, work seen during the inspection, and results from early exam entries suggest that the proportion exceeding expected progress in English is now on track to be well above the national average.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium funding to provide additional support for eligible students. They make similar progress to other students across all year groups and their results compare favourably to similar students nationally at GCSE. In 2013, in English, eligible students were roughly half a grade behind their classmates. In mathematics, the gap was approximately two thirds of a grade. Current assessments suggest that the gaps in both subjects are reducing.
- Disabled students, those who have special educational needs, students from ethnic minorities and those for whom English is an additional language make outstanding progress from their different starting points because of well-planned and targeted support.
- Year 7 'catch-up' funding is being used effectively to provide additional support such as one-to-one tuition and group work to ensure that eligible students acquire the necessary literacy and numeracy skills that they need to be successful. As a result, they are making excellent progress and the gap between them and other students is narrowing.
- Students with high prior attainment achieve well. However, in English GCSE in 2012 and 2013, the proportion of them gaining higher grades was below the national average. The academy has put in place additional provision, including extra classes and smaller teaching groups, and from current assessments, work scrutiny, lesson observation and results from early entries, these students are making outstanding progress.
- The academy uses early entry for GCSE English and mathematics for selected students. This has had a positive impact on results. Many students who reach the highest grades have the opportunities to follow AS levels in the subject, others study different subjects, and some students retake the examinations and achieve higher grades.
- Students join the sixth form from other schools as well as from the academy, and their attainment on entry is broadly average. They make outstanding progress. Achievement in applied and vocational courses is particularly strong. The proportion of students reaching higher grades of A* to B has improved, particular at AS level. Current assessment data shows that this

improvement is expected to continue.

- Students who attend off-site, part-time vocational courses are monitored closely and make similar progress to their peers.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Almost all of the teaching observed was good or outstanding, including in the sixth form. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and many teach with a passion and enthusiasm which captures students' interest and leads to outstanding progress.
- In the most successful lessons, teachers have high expectations and use detailed assessment information to plan activities that are at the right level of difficulty for students' different abilities and which engage their interest. Teachers skilfully question students to check their understanding and adapt tasks and activities to challenge the most able while ensuring that others get the support and help that they need so that all make outstanding progress.
- Among the many examples of outstanding teaching seen by inspectors was a mathematics lesson where Year 10 students were challenged to a high level to use algebra to solve everyday problems. Year 9 art students made pop art sculptures, moving from two-dimensional to three-dimensional shapes, while assessing their own and others' work. Year 7 students were captivated by the different properties of cells while using microscopes for the first time.
- Progress is checked regularly for disabled students, those who have special educational needs, those for whom the academy receives additional funding and those for whom English is an additional language. This ensures that timely additional support is given when it is needed. The highly qualified teaching assistants who work with these students make a considerable contribution to their outstanding success.
- There is a strong emphasis on developing students' literacy, numeracy and communication skills across all subjects which contributes greatly to students' overall success.
- Most marking provides students with helpful advice and guidance on what they need to do to improve their work. However, this is not consistent across all subjects. Occasionally, written feedback does not give enough specific detail to assist students to move to the next level.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Students are proud to attend the academy and their attitudes to learning are excellent. One student said, 'It is a great environment to work in. You learn well and it is enjoyable at the same time.'
- There is a happy and harmonious atmosphere around the academy. Students are polite and considerate towards adults and towards one another. Sixth form students are excellent role models through their positive attitudes and focus on study, and their mentoring of younger students.
- Students are very positive about the relationships that they have with their teachers. They told inspectors that lessons run smoothly, that poor behaviour is rare and that rules are consistently and fairly applied by staff.

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Students say they feel happy and safe in the academy. They are aware of the different kinds of bullying, including racist and homophobic behaviour and cyber-bullying. They say that incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with firmly and fast.
- Students were very positive about the support that they get from their personal tutors. One student said, 'Nothing is too much trouble for them. They care for us and they are never judgemental.' They value the information that they gain through tutor time about how to stay safe, the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse, and the advantages of a healthy lifestyle.
- Levels of attendance are above average and the academy has excellent systems of support for students and their families so that the number of persistent absentees is very low.
- Exclusion rates are falling. The academy uses its own behaviour support centre effectively to help vulnerable students.
- Students' attendance at courses off-site is excellent. The academy liaises well with providers to check students' attendance and behaviour, and to ensure they are benefiting from the alternative provision.
- The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire believe that students' behaviour is at least good, students are well cared for and the academy deals with bullying effectively.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The academy is exceptionally well led by the headteacher and the senior leadership team. The headteacher sets high expectations and is relentless in his pursuit of excellence. He is well supported by staff at all levels.
- Staff morale is high. The overwhelming majority of responses to the staff questionnaire were positive. One teacher wrote: 'This school is always striving to provide the best possible education for its children. All staff are working towards a collective goal and are supported well by the senior leadership team.'
- The monitoring of teaching is thorough and uncompromising and, as a result, has led to a significant improvement in the proportion of outstanding teaching since the last inspection.
- Performance management is rigorous, and staff have to meet exacting targets in order to be rewarded financially. Underperformance is not accepted and, although excellent support is given to staff to improve, leaders take tough action when necessary.
- Self-evaluation is sharp and accurate. It focuses clearly on areas for development. Senior leaders and curriculum and subject leaders monitor the work in their areas closely. They are rigorous and accurate in their tracking and analysis of students' progress, and they are swift to respond if there are any signs of underachievement in their subjects or areas of responsibility.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. The drive for excellence has maintained excellent teaching and outstanding achievement for students.
- Professional development is excellent. Staff have access to high-quality training provided by the

academy and externally through links with other schools and universities. Several of the teachers are studying for Masters' degrees, and staff keep fully up to date with the latest developments in education. The academy has a strong track record of developing its own leaders.

- The academy uses additional funding effectively to make sure that all students have equality of access and equal opportunities. It uses pupil premium and Year 7 'catch-up' funding to provide additional teaching and pastoral support for eligible students and to ensure that all students have full access to extra-curricular activities.
- The academy has strong partnerships with schools and academies linked through its sponsors. This collaboration gives many opportunities to share ideas and expertise in developing the curriculum, as well as for staff and governor training.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is regularly reviewed to check that it is meeting students' needs. Good links with primary schools, colleges and universities, local businesses, and excellent external careers advice aid student progression at different times in their education. The academy is very proud that almost all students are successful in moving to education, employment or training at the end of Year 11 or Year 13.
- Extra-curricular activities are diverse and plentiful, and very much appreciated by the students. The academy's emphasis on positive relationships, the rich experience gained through the curriculum, and the support students gain through their personal tutorials promote students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development very well.
- There is a strong partnership with parents and carers. The overwhelming majority who responded to the online questionnaire were pleased with the education and support provided by the academy.
- The academy works well with the local authority, which has provided excellent support for teachers in their first year of teaching.
- Arrangements for safeguarding, including risk assessments for off-site education, meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are relentless in their drive to raise standards and improve all aspects of the work of the academy. They bring a wealth of experience and expertise to their roles. They rigorously monitor the performance of the academy against other schools nationally. They are thorough in their analysis of information of different groups of students' attainment and progress, including vulnerable students and those eligible for government funding. Governors are clear about the link between the quality of teaching and success of students, and they make sure that pay awards are linked closely to the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
 - Governors oversee that all statutory child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures are in place, and make sure that they undertake relevant training to keep abreast of changes nationally. They manage the resources of the academy very well, and monitor the effectiveness and impact of their decisions, and those of senior leaders, to ensure best value.

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	134993
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	432254

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	1263
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	345
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stewart Towe
Headteacher	Simon Topper
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2011
Telephone number	0121 525 1700
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