

Stanchester Academy

East Stoke, Stoke-sub-Hamdon, Somerset, TA14 6UG

Inspection dates 23–24 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
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 school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' progress, especially in mathematics, has been slow since the previous inspection. This has led to GCSE results which were not as good as they should be.
- The proportion of students who have gained good grades in both mathematics and English has also been consistently below national average since the previous inspection.
- The organisation of teaching, particularly in mathematics, has not been as good as it needed to be to ensure good progress.
- The marking of students' work is not consistently good because teachers do not always give students clear advice about what they must do next to improve.
- Parents are not given enough information about their child's progress and some do not feel the school communicates with them well enough.
- The use of additional funding to help students in danger of falling behind was not used efficiently in the past.

The school has the following strengths

- The new principal has already brought about substantial and effective changes in the school; he has the full and effective support of senior teachers and the governing body.
- Teaching has improved rapidly with systematic monitoring and support for staff.
- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are polite and well mannered and are keen to learn.
- Current students are making good progress, the result of improved teaching and students being more enthusiastic about learning.
- The positive ethos throughout the school is underpinned by a strong belief that students can and will be successful. Students and staff feel that this has raised morale considerably.
- The school provides a safe and secure environment in which students thrive.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 teachers in 32 lessons, one of which was observed jointly with the principal. In addition, inspectors made some short visits to lessons and to the school’s special educational needs base.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of Governors, senior and middle leaders, teachers and groups of students.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work, visited several tutor groups and an assembly, and looked at samples of students’ work. They also looked at progress data, documents about the school’s development and evaluation, safeguarding information and records about attendance and behaviour. The records showing the impact of professional development for staff were also examined.
- Over 70 parents and carers completed the online questionnaire (Parent View) and inspectors received eight written responses from parents. All members of staff were also able to contribute their views in a questionnaire; 60 responses were received.

Inspection team

Ann Cox, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Teresa Gilpin	Additional inspector
Phil Taylor	Additional inspector
Christine Young	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average secondary school and caters for students up to 16 years. The school serves the area around Stoke-sub-Hamdon in South Somerset. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage, with very small numbers from several minority ethnic groups.
- The school roll has fallen in recent years in line with the local picture of fewer secondary-age students. However, the number of students expected to join the school in September 2014 is higher and a pattern of growth is anticipated.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is in line with the national average, and the proportion supported through school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is below average.
- A below-average proportion of students receive pupil premium funding. This provides additional funding for looked-after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and children of service families. The proportion of students from service families is higher than that seen nationally.
- In Years 7 and 8, about a quarter of students benefit from additional help in mathematics and English, funded by the government's catch-up programme.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- In Key Stage 4 a small number of students attend work-related training courses off-site through the South Somerset Partnership School, Yeovil College and the Reach Project.
- A new principal was appointed in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' achievement, especially in mathematics, by ensuring that all groups of students, including those supported by pupil premium funding, make progress which is at least good.
- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by ensuring that teachers mark work and give students clear guidance about what they must do to improve their work.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - strengthening the leadership of mathematics
 - improving communication with parents and carers so that they are better informed about their child's progress and how they can help their child to improve
 - forging stronger links with the wider community, so as to bring about greater understanding of the school's work and successes.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils **requires improvement**

- Students' achievement requires improvement because their progress has been too slow, especially in mathematics. In consequence, GCSE grades are below average in mathematics.
- The progress of students in English has shown improvement over time, and the 2013 GCSE results show that they made average progress from their starting points.
- Current pupils are making much better progress in both mathematics and English. Current Year 11 students are on track to gain higher GCSE grades. These improvements have come about following a whole-school focus on teaching and on behaviour, driven by the new principal and the school's leaders.
- The most able students in Year 11 sat GCSE mathematics in Year 10 and nearly all of them achieved high grades, demonstrating very good progress. These students are now studying an additional GCSE in statistics. For the very small number who did not gain their target grade there will be an opportunity for them to re-sit the mathematics examination in Year 11.
- The school has now developed a wide range of strategies to help students entitled to pupil premium and catch-up funding. The gap between students entitled to pupil premium funding and others was equivalent to one GCSE grade lower in both mathematics and English in 2013. The gap between those entitled to pupil premium funding and their peers is getting smaller in both mathematics and English.
- A small number of students are from service families and their performance is at least in line with other students'. Similarly, the few pupils from a range of ethnic backgrounds make similar progress to their peers.
- The proportion of students who achieve the highest grades in English is just below average, but for mathematics there is bigger gap, although the results in 2013 were better than in 2012. Higher targets are now being set for all students and this is raising their aspirations.
- Good attention is given to allowing students to develop their literacy skills; most students develop into confident readers.
- The provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs has been improved and current students are making good progress.
- A small proportion of students in Key Stage 4 receive vocational, work-related training at other centres for a part of the week; they make good progress and all leave school with useful qualifications.

The quality of teaching **is good**

- The school has focused on improving the quality of teaching, particularly since the arrival of the new principal. The quality of teaching is now consistently good. Some outstanding teaching was seen across a range of subjects and in different year groups. As a result of the developments in teaching, the rate of progress by current students has also improved significantly.
- The leadership of teaching has been resolute in removing inadequate teaching and reducing practice requiring improvement. Examination of the school's own monitoring records showed that there was close agreement about the quality of teaching observed during the inspection.
- In most lessons there is evidence of detailed lesson planning and effective tracking of students' progress, which contributes to their good learning. Marking and feedback to students is very good in some subjects, but this is not always the case. The school needs to ensure that there is more consistency in marking, so that students are given useful advice about how to improve.
- The school's staff have been united in promoting a positive self-belief in students about their capacity to succeed. Target setting for individual students has been revised so now students are now given aspirational targets which raise their expectations. A new rewards structure is linked to success, which is regularly celebrated.

- Teachers have developed very good skills for checking students' understanding and then reshaping tasks when necessary so that students' learning is good and secure before they move on.
- More attention has been given to ensuring the success of disabled students and those with special educational needs. There is now a plan with better assessment of these students' needs, a wide range of strategies to help them and effective deployment of teaching assistants.
- A lot of effort is being devoted to help students to become good learners. Examples of this initiative include the use of dedicated lesson time in Years 7 and 8, and regular sessions with tutors.
- Teachers regularly set meaningful homework which is completed well by students. Use of the internet to make homework available has helped both students and their parents.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Around the school students are polite and courteous to each other, to members of staff and to visitors. Students usually listen attentively in lessons, and almost always respond quickly to teachers' instructions.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning and arrive promptly for lessons with the right equipment, although work in their books is sometimes untidy.
- Students are given opportunities to take on responsibilities; for example, some Year 11 students become 'blue ties' and help to run the school smoothly. They are respected by other students and provide good role models for younger ones.
- Students are actively involved with fundraising activities and regularly donate considerable sums to charities chosen by the school council.
- Attendance rates are slightly better than those at similar schools. The rate of persistent absence has fallen dramatically over two years and has now stabilised at levels lower than in similar schools. This sustained improvement has resulted from diligent work in following up and minimising absences, especially with families who can be hard to reach.
- The school has had exclusion rates above average, and fixed-term exclusions have been used to deal effectively with poor behaviour. The school has not tolerated incidents of tobacco smoking and disruptive behaviour, for example. The exclusion rate has now reduced to more typical levels as the school's good behaviour management systems have been embedded, and there have been timely interventions and closer working with external agencies.
- Students are well informed about different forms of bullying and the school takes active steps to ensure that antisocial behaviour and unnecessary risks are minimised. Training is given to students in order to equip them to avoid cyber-bullying, and students report that the school goes beyond that by alerting families to potential hazards on occasions. Students are sensitive about issues such as racism and homophobic bullying and they have a good understanding of potential hazards, including alcohol and substance abuse.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Few instances of bullying are reported and on the rare occasions when there is an issue, the school deals with it swiftly and effectively. Not all adults who responded to questionnaires shared this view. However, the students who spoke to inspectors reported that they have complete confidence in the school to deal with any matters which are reported.
- The school makes sure that all students have equality of opportunity and it actively tackles potential sources of discrimination.
- When older students attend courses at other centres, their attendance and behaviour are carefully checked, as are all aspects of ensuring their safety and well-being.

The leadership and management are good

- The school has been extremely well led by the principal since he took up his appointment in September 2013. He has been unrelenting in pursuit of improvements to raise standards across the school. The school's capacity to further improve in the future is very good.
- The principal is very well supported by a team of senior leaders and middle managers who now share the same goal of improvement across the school. All leaders clearly communicate high expectations and ambition for the school and its students.
- The leadership of mathematics requires strengthening. Currently, a faculty leader has temporarily taken on the role as an additional responsibility while the school seeks an enduring resolution of the issue.
- The school gives high priority to securing the professional development of all staff. Middle leaders have benefited from development opportunities which have strengthened their capacity to bring about positive changes. The professional development of staff is underpinned by performance management that encourages, challenges and supports teachers to continually improve.
- The school has started to review the reporting of progress to parents and carers and recognises that further developments are needed to improve the effectiveness of communications.
- There is now very good attention given to developing high levels of literacy. For example, this term the school introduced a daily ten-minute reading session for all students and teachers. In every subject, attention is given to developing literacy, which is helping to secure good progress in students' reading and writing.
- The school's curriculum provides a broad range of subjects and opportunities for all students. When it supports their interests and abilities, students follow alternative pathways to ensure that they remain motivated and achieve as well as they can.
- The school is working hard to develop ways to help students who are in danger of falling behind. Inspectors found that these interventions are helpful.
- The school has rigorous systems in place to ensure that safeguarding and child protection arrangements meet statutory requirements. Record keeping is exemplary.
- Students are given a wide range of experiences to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school takes active steps to give them a balanced view of other cultures; for example, a hugely successful 'Africa Day' was held last term and a similar event is being planned to broaden students' understanding and knowledge about China.
- The school has secured the award of International Schools status and has strong links with numerous other countries. Students have opportunities to visit a wide range of countries, including Spain, France, Germany, India and Zambia.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body works very closely with the principal and other senior staff. Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching and its impact on learning as they have regular meetings with the school's leaders and members of the teaching staff. Governors keep up to date with appropriate training and examine information about the school's performance so that they can evaluate the school's progress; they are well aware of its relative strengths and weaknesses. The governing body challenges school leaders to constantly review their work to ensure a continuous drive for improvement.
 - The governing body plays an active part in performance management of the most senior leaders and monitors performance management of other teachers to ensure that their salary progression is related to students' achievement and the quality of teaching.
 - Governors scrutinise the school's finances and make sure that funds, particularly for pupil premium students, are used to raise standards. The governing body works hard to engage parents, carers and representatives of the community so that their views help to inform its decisions. The governing body fully meets its responsibilities with regard to safeguarding.

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	137080
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	431089

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	664
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Collard
Principal	Jason Beardmore
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 July 2012
Telephone number	01935 823200
Fax number	01935 826635
Email address	office@stanchester-academy.co.uk

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