

Saxmundham Free School

Seaman Avenue, Saxmundham, Suffolk, IP17 1DZ

Inspection dates 21–22 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Outstanding leadership has resulted in the creation of a highly cohesive school community. The school's leaders communicate a sense of ambition that is reinforced and shared by all.
- Students are safe, well cared-for and respond exceptionally well to the clear and consistent expectations about behaviour. Relationships between students, and with staff, are very positive, as are attitudes towards learning.
- Teaching is usually good, sometimes outstanding and improving strongly and rapidly, because of the challenge and support provided by leaders.
- Achievement is good. Students, including those supported by the pupil premium and those with special educational needs, make good progress.
- Leaders and teachers assess and track students' progress very carefully. Effective action is taken to support those who join the school with gaps in their knowledge and understanding, or who are at risk of falling behind.
- All students participate in the wide range of enrichment activities that contribute very positively to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Many make an active contribution to the development of the school community.
- The Seckford Foundation Free Schools Trust and the governing body make a significant contribution to the success of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always ask questions, or set work, that ensures all students develop their ideas and responses fully.
- Some students do not communicate their arguments effectively when writing at length.
- Marking does not always make clear how students can improve. Teachers sometimes do not ensure students respond to feedback, or check their responses indicate that they have understood it.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 21 lessons, of which six were seen jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors visited a sample of enrichment activities.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, teachers, and three members of the governing body. Inspectors also spoke with parents.
- Inspectors talked with many students about their learning and life at the school, and reviewed their work across different subjects.
- Inspectors took account of the 27 questionnaires completed by staff, 48 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and two letters received from parents.
- The inspection team observed the school's work, reviewed monitoring data about students' progress and achievement, and examined documentation used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school's work.

Inspection team

Jason Howard, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jacqueline Pentlow

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Saxmundham Free School is smaller than the average-size secondary school.
- The school was founded by the Seckford Foundation Free Schools Trust, to meet the wishes of parents for more choice in educational provision within the local area.
- The school opened in September 2012 with students in Years 7, 8 and 9. There are currently students in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10.
- Students will first take external examinations in the summer of 2015.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups, or who speak English as an additional language, are significantly below average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding to support particular groups of students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals) is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is above average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school works in partnership with other schools that are part of the Seckford Foundation Free Schools Trust, including Woodbridge School, a local independent school. The headteacher reports to the principal of the Trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching matches that of the most effective in the school, by:
 - ensuring all teachers ask questions that allow them to identify and correct students' errors or misconceptions quickly, and that enable all to develop their ideas and responses fully
 - continuing to develop the literacy skills of students so that all are able to communicate their ideas, and support their arguments, effectively when completing pieces of extended writing
 - ensuring all teachers use their information about what students have already achieved to plan activities that will help individuals to make rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding
 - making sure that students respond to regular feedback that makes clear what they need to do to in order to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Although some are very able, students in Years 8, 9 and 10 joined the school with below average attainment overall; attainment on entry for the current Year 7 was broadly in line with the national average. All students, including those who have joined the school very recently, are set very high targets. Work seen in lessons, and in students' books, indicates that almost all work towards these effectively and make good progress.
- The school tracks students' progress carefully and works with the local Trust partner school, and the local authority, to check that teachers are applying the correct grades to students' work.
- Almost all students have made at least good progress from their starting points in English, science and particularly in mathematics, since joining the school. Some, including the less-able, have made more rapid progress than that expected and so attainment is improving. Students make good, and in some cases remarkable, progress across other curriculum areas.
- The most able students make rapid progress across subject areas and their attainment is generally above expected levels. A small number in Years 9 and 10 have received targeted support in English to refine the techniques they use when completing extended pieces of writing. Recent assessments indicate that this is helping them to catch up but the attainment of some is below that expected for their age.
- School monitoring data indicate that Year 7 catch-up funding is being used well in order to help those who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in English at the end of Key Stage 2 to improve their literacy skills. The school is using a range of imaginative and effective strategies to develop students' writing and mathematical skills across the curriculum.
- Any underachievement is very carefully identified and monitored, and a range of strategies, including small-group and one-to-one tuition, are used to promote higher levels of progress.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make rapid progress from their starting points. All at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are on track to meet their challenging attainment targets because of the highly effective support that they receive.
- The majority of students supported by the pupil premium enter the school with attainment that is lower than their peers. They make good progress in English, mathematics and most other subjects due to effective teaching and targeted support both within, and outside of, lessons. As a result, recent monitoring data indicate the gap in attainment is narrowing as they move through the school.
- Students are being well-prepared for the next stage in their education and for later life. Many who have struggled to achieve highly in their previous schools are making rapid progress. Careers fairs, university visits and engagement in the wide range of opportunities and experiences available are encouraging many to aspire, work hard, and achieve.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students arrive at lessons well-equipped and ready to learn; they respond with enthusiasm to the different approaches that teachers use and the high expectations they set.

- Most teachers use the detailed and accurate information they have about students' progress to plan activities that will help individuals of widely varying ability levels to take the next steps in their learning. These usually help students to acquire new knowledge and understanding quickly and make at least good, and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Students appreciate their teachers' secure subject knowledge and clarity about how particular activities will help them to reach their next target. Teachers and other adults who support learning monitor the progress of different individuals carefully. They provide good additional support, or challenge for the more-able, so that they move forward quickly.
- Teachers use questioning well to check students' knowledge and understanding and, often, to encourage them to develop their thoughts and support their ideas or conclusions. Sometimes, teachers provide answers and explanations too quickly, rather than finding out where students have made an error in their thinking or working.
- Teachers are helping to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills across a range of subjects, and via whole-school initiatives that promote reading. Students regularly read confidently in class, and individuals whose reading ages are low receive targeted additional support. Teachers of mathematics are working with others to make sure students can apply the mathematical skills that they learn in their other subjects. Monitoring shows that students are making improved progress as a result of these approaches.
- Flexible and imaginative teaching arrangements help to ensure that individuals receive the support they need. One example, observed during inspection, involved a small group of students working on their individual targets to improve their spoken French, while the rest of Year 10 focused on effective examination technique for the written exam. The teacher's expertise and careful planning, and the impeccable behaviour of all students allowed them to learn and use new techniques, and receive feedback about their progress, during a single lesson.
- Marking is regular and makes clear what students have done well, and the level they have reached. Comments usually give specific advice about how students can improve; students' progress is more limited when feedback does not make this clear, or when students do not respond to the advice.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Leaders have set clear expectations and have reinforced these consistently; they have also worked carefully with students who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour. As a result, excellent conduct is the norm.
- Students are exceptionally polite, courteous and welcoming. Students wear their uniform with pride and treat the school buildings, and all those who work within them, with respect at all times. The school site is exceptionally clean and tidy.
- Students who spoke with inspectors were keen to talk about their progress, and their enjoyment of the many opportunities the school offers them, such as drama productions and sporting activities. They appreciate the ability to contribute to the development of the school by serving as prefects or 'student ambassadors.'
- Students from all backgrounds socialise well together during break and lunch periods. All have lunch with their teachers in the restaurant and several said that this helps make the school

community feel like 'a big family.'

- Students work very well with each other and with their teachers during lessons and try hard to reach their personal targets. They demonstrate a thirst for knowledge and a strong desire to learn. Students listen to, and carefully consider, the contributions made by their peers and work very productively both on their own and in groups. They spoke with evident pride about their 'Saxmundham Hero' badges, awarded for progress, and told inspectors they were motivated by the recognition of their achievements and the school's reward system.
- The school's monitoring records indicate that disruption to learning occurs very rarely, and is dealt with quickly and effectively. There have been no exclusions since the school opened in September 2012.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students say they feel extremely safe at school and that teachers know them well and care about them. They report that incidences of bullying are exceptionally rare and responded to effectively. The use of homophobic or racist language is almost unknown. Students know how to stay safe in a variety of contexts, including when using the internet.
- A number of students joining the school were previously persistent absentees; leaders have used a range of effective strategies to almost eliminate persistent absence and maximise attendance overall, which is now in line with the national average and rising. Students are punctual in arrival both to school and to lessons.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and other senior leaders demonstrate a relentless drive to accelerate the progress and improve the achievement of each and every student at the school. They are determined to remove any barrier that might prevent any student from reaching their full potential, and to encourage all to aspire to excellence. Other members of staff share this drive and determination.
- Leaders, teachers and governors base their actions on a deep and accurate understanding of the school's performance, and the ability and potential of all. Senior leaders regularly and rigorously check the quality of all aspects of the school's work. They have devised effective, and sometimes innovative, ways in which to monitor the impact of actions and the use of resources, such as the funding the school receives for those supported by the pupil premium.
- Leaders have secured a rapid improvement in the standard of teaching so that it is good, and sometimes outstanding. Less effective teachers have been given precisely-targeted support that has helped them to meet their challenging targets and ensure students learn well and make good progress.
- The extended length of the school day means there is time for students to engage in a wide range of additional activities, including French cooking, Young Enterprise, dance, debating and drama. Some of the time is used to provide catch-up sessions in literacy and numeracy, or allow students to take additional GCSEs, such as in computing. Students appreciate these opportunities, which promote their personal development well. Leaders ensure that all students can attend them by providing transport home where necessary.
- The school has developed activities to prepare students for the next stage in their education and for the world of work. Attendance at a recent 'post-16 pathway' event, and visits to universities,

have helped students in Years 9 and 10 to start planning the next stages of their education. A 'careers fair', well-supported by local and national businesses, together with other resources have helped students understand career options and the qualifications needed for entry to them. All students regularly update 'personal education plans' which focus them on what they need to do next to make progress towards those qualifications. These are shared with parents.

- Leaders have used a number of strategies by which to engage with parents, including 'kitchens of the globe' lunch events and a well-attended 'forum' within which parents offer the headteacher feedback and suggestions for school improvement. Parents are exceptionally positive about all aspects of the school's work, as evidenced by the 48 responses to the online, Parent View questionnaire.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. Students challenge each other's views and explore moral dilemmas within philosophy lessons and, for example, consider issues around slavery in history lessons and poverty within the geography curriculum. They consider the significance of different religious celebrations such as Diwali.
- The Trust has an Education Committee which helps to support its schools and monitors standards. It employs a Principal who provides leadership and promotes consistency across its schools. The headteacher values the support, and challenge, provided by the Principal who helps to check the effectiveness of the school's work and advise on how further improvements can be made. Teachers of physical education work across both this school and Beccles Free School, and some joint staff training activities take place.
- Safeguarding arrangements, and procedures for making checks on those who are employed by the school, are exemplary.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governing body minutes show that governors have a secure understanding of performance data, and challenge senior leaders effectively. Individual governors have defined responsibilities and monitor aspects of the school's work through well-organised visits. These are recorded and discussed during governing body meetings. Governors follow up issues identified with leaders.
 - Governors challenge leaders as to how pupil premium funding is spent and have a detailed understanding of the most effective strategies as demonstrated by national research. They have helped senior leaders to evaluate the impact of the school's use of these resources. Governors use performance management appropriately to set the headteacher challenging but achievable targets. They have supported decisions that link teachers' pay to how well students are achieving.

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	138273
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	425169

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	171
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Inga Grimsey
Headteacher	David Lees
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01728 633910
Fax number	N/A
Email address	enquiries@saxmundhamfreeschool.org.uk

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