

Stratton Upper School

Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade, SG18 8JB

Inspection dates 23–24 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students' GCSE results in English and mathematics are improving well and they make good progress because teachers set high expectations for their work.
- The progress of disabled students, those who have special educational needs and disadvantaged students is good. They receive effective support in class from staff who know their needs well.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress because they have positive attitudes to their work, show well-developed study skills and are taught well.
- Strong relationships between staff and students ensure that behaviour is good throughout the school. Students listen carefully to each other and to their teachers, and concentrate well on the tasks they are set.
- Students feel safe and secure because the school provides well for their personal development and well-being.
- Teaching has improved well since the last inspection. Teachers check students' understanding well by asking carefully chosen questions, and use their good subject knowledge to set and explain demanding tasks.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors provide strong and effective leadership. They check students' achievement and the quality of teaching regularly and take appropriate action when any difficulties are identified to make sure they continue to improve.
- Subject and year team leaders track students' progress well, using the resulting information to plan appropriate support for individual students.
- The governors are knowledgeable and well trained. They monitor improvements in the school carefully, challenging staff through regular meetings and visits to the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' progress in science is not consistently good. Teachers do not always set work that is sufficiently demanding or give students enough help so that they know what they need to do to improve their skills and understanding.
- Students do not improve their understanding enough by reflecting on and responding to teachers' written comments on their work.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make slower progress in some small group sessions because staff do not challenge them as much as they could.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students’ learning in 45 lessons, including 16 that were seen jointly with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors made short visits to other lessons and tutor group sessions. They looked at samples of students’ work, interviewed groups of students, visited a school assembly and heard Year 9 students read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, year team leaders, teachers, and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school’s self-evaluation, school development plans, behaviour records, safeguarding records, governing body documents, and documents relating to the management of teachers’ performance.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 99 questionnaires returned by school staff, and 85 responses submitted by parents to the online ‘Parent View’ survey.

Inspection team

Roger Waddingham, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Cheryl Jackson	Additional Inspector
Janet Lewis	Additional Inspector
David New	Additional Inspector
Lynne Thorogood	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It is an academy, run by the Stratton Education Trust.
- The school sponsors Gamlingay Village College, a partner middle school. The headteacher acts as the executive headteacher of the middle school and the two schools share a governing body.
- The school serves the town of Biggleswade and the surrounding villages. It has a fully functioning farm on site, which is looked after by the students and specialist staff.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported through the pupil premium is below average. This is additional funding allocated by the government for students who are looked after by the local authority or known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is also below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for Year 11 students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school plays a leading part in the Central Bedfordshire Teaching School, which provides training for teachers within the consortium of schools.
- The school offers work-related training for six students at Bedford College and the Academy of Central Bedfordshire.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' achievement in science by:
 - setting demanding work for all students
 - consistently giving clear guidance to students on what they need to do to improve their written work.
- Further improve teaching and learning by making sure that:
 - teachers give students enough opportunities to reflect on the progress they are making and how to improve their understanding
 - all staff supporting disabled students and those who have special educational needs expect them to make rapid progress through working hard on appropriately challenging tasks.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are effective because they present clear and consistent expectations for high standards of achievement and behaviour in all aspects of school life. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well and have a good capacity to undertake the necessary steps to further develop students' achievement and the quality of teaching. Subject and year team leaders are increasingly effective because they are well supported in regular meetings and have appropriate training.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching is very effective because staff are well trained in gathering a good range of evidence about individual teachers' performance and using it well to identify development points and training needs. Staff report that they receive good training, including through close links within the local teaching school consortium.
- The tracking of students' progress has improved greatly in recent years. Well-established arrangements to check the reliability of assessments and regular analysis of this information lead to the rapid identification of any students who are falling behind in their learning. Leaders at all levels make good use of this information to help decide what extra support might be needed. For example, the funding for disadvantaged students is carefully allocated to individual and small group support where any areas of weaker achievement have been identified.
- The school uses its monitoring evidence well to plan for future developments. Both whole-school and departmental plans have a clear focus on raising standards of achievement. While school targets for individual students' progress have not always been demanding enough in the past, they are now more challenging and this is reflected in departmental plans which have appropriate detail on the actions needed to continue to raise standards.
- The sixth form is led and managed well. Students are very positive about life in the sixth form. They appreciate the good range of subjects they have to choose from and the advice and guidance they receive about their career options.
- Students are offered a good range of academic and work-related GCSE subjects, and recent improvements to the time allocations for each subject ensure that they match students' abilities and interests well. They appreciate the range of clubs and sporting opportunities after school. Students feel the guidance they receive on future career and education opportunities, both from the school and from outside agencies, is very helpful. Students, including those in the sixth form, are well prepared for the next stages in their education.
- Good promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has a positive impact on their safety and well-being. Spiritual and cultural experiences are supported well through school visits and visiting speakers. The school farm is a valued resource that is used well to contribute to all students' personal development.
- The planned programme of themes for the week in assemblies and tutor periods prepares students well for life in modern Britain. It includes, for example, topics relating to respect for individual beliefs, the rule of law, and democratic values. The school's procedures to ensure that students behave and attend well are now well established.
- The support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs is well managed. The coordinator ensures that these students receive help from specialist staff, both in class and in small groups as appropriate. Sometimes support staff do not challenge students to make as much progress as they could in small group sessions.
- The school's leaders have a clear commitment to equality of opportunity and make sure that students feel confident there is no discrimination. The arrangements for safeguarding meet all national requirements and are highly effective, with regular training for all staff.

The school monitors the progress, attendance and behaviour of students educated off-site carefully and chooses providers that are best suited to students' abilities and interests.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors monitor improvements in the school carefully, receiving regular reports from senior staff on key development initiatives, teaching quality and students' achievement. They give very effective challenge and support to school staff through regular meetings with them and visits to the school.
- The governors are well trained, and have a good understanding of what performance data tell them about students' achievement and the quality of teaching.
- Governors are appropriately involved in decisions about the allocation of performance-related pay to staff, including responses to any underperformance, and the use of the pupil premium funding. They keep themselves well informed about the impact of these arrangements on standards.
- They take an active part in discussions relating to the curriculum and assessment.
- Governors review the budgets for the school and the Trust regularly, ensuring appropriate accountability for expenditure, and careful planning for future developments.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They show high levels of respect for staff and for each other, and poor behaviour in lessons is very rare. Students move round the school site in a responsible manner, showing a good regard for the school buildings and resources, and helping to keep the school an attractive and tidy place in which to learn.
- Students are ready to learn promptly when they arrive in class. They listen carefully to each other in lessons and most are keen to volunteer answers to questions. Sixth form students behave well and enjoy the responsibilities they are given to develop their research and study skills.
- Students of all ages report that they enjoy coming to school. This is supported by the great majority of parents, who say that students feel safe and happy in school.
- The school monitors the behaviour and safety of students educated on other sites carefully, and makes sure that their behaviour is good and they are attending appropriately.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say that they feel well cared for and have confidence in the school's systems to prevent bullying. Instances of bullying of any kind are rare.
- Students are well supported by the school's work to develop their awareness of personal safety, with appropriate coverage of topics on internet safety and anti-bullying, for example.
- The school uses effective procedures to promote good attendance. Managers have worked carefully with local authority staff to identify students needing support. As a result, attendance is improving rapidly from below average and is now much closer to the national average. Also the proportion of students missing over 30 school days per year has decreased. Exclusions from the school have decreased substantially as a result of the new policy of providing support for some students out of class in small independent study groups.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection because senior and middle leaders monitor it carefully and provide effective support where difficulties are identified.
- Students develop their literacy, reading and numeracy skills well because these skills are taught effectively across a range of subjects. As a result they speak with confidence, set out their written work accurately

and neatly, and show increasing confidence in numeracy as they progress through the school. The teaching of science is not always so effective in developing students' skills and understanding.

- Staff use the new school planning sheet very well to help them plan work at the correct level to challenge students of all abilities and to match resources and tasks well to the learning aims for each lesson. They show good knowledge of their subjects when explaining ideas through technical terms and step-by-step descriptions.
- In a wide range of subjects teachers extend learning well by asking students for explanations in detail, rather than accepting simple short answers. Many staff have effective techniques for involving all students in this discussion work, but occasionally less-able students in particular are not given enough time to consider their answers.
- The effectiveness of teachers' marking has been a continuing development focus and examples were seen in most departments where staff used written feedback to students well to show them what improvements were needed. However, in many cases students did not respond to these comments, so they did not improve their work by reflecting further on what they were being told.
- Teachers manage behaviour in lessons very effectively, and the quality of relationships between staff and students is a strength of the school. Many staff promote students' study skills well, preparing them well for sixth form work.
- Recent developments in the setting and use of homework mean that students are aware of its importance. They feel well supported in accessing the tasks and make good use of the online facilities for undertaking homework relating to mathematics, for example.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers use their good knowledge of students' current understanding to explore new ideas in depth through detailed questioning.

The achievement of pupils is good

- GCSE results are improving strongly and students of all abilities make good progress from their starting points on entering the school. They show good achievement in a wide range of subjects because they are taught well and are interested in their work.
- Students show increasingly strong achievement in English. More-able students in particular make above-average progress and the proportion of students achieving top GCSE grades is high. Students say that they enjoy the tasks they are set and appreciate the helpful feedback they receive from their teachers.
- In mathematics, students make good progress. The great majority take pride in their work, presenting results and graphs neatly and accurately. They talk about their work with confidence and many show good skill in explaining their reasoning.
- Standards in science, while improving, are not as strong as in English and mathematics. More-able pupils generally make secure progress in the separate sciences. Middle-ability pupils do not always make the progress they should because the tasks they are set are not demanding enough and they do not receive enough help with improving their work.
- The school does not enter any students early for GCSEs. All students continue their studies in English and mathematics until the end of the course.
- The most-able students have made consistently good progress over time in English, supported by the challenging work and in-depth questioning seen in lessons. They are now also making good progress in mathematics, where the focus on talking about their understanding has helped students greatly.
- The school makes effective use of pupil premium funding. At GCSE, the gap in performance between

disadvantaged students and others is narrowing. In 2014 their attainment was lower than that of their classmates and that found nationally by half a grade in English and one grade in mathematics. These students are now making progress in line with their peers in English and although improvements in mathematics progress are slower, school assessments show that the picture is improving for 2015. Their current progress in mathematics is in line with that of other groups.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress in lessons. Teachers plan tasks that are well matched to their needs and they respond well. In some cases, where students are working in small groups they are not challenged to work hard enough and the tasks are not demanding enough so progress is slower.
- Sixth form students achieve well, and their progress has been consistently above average in a wide range of subjects for several years. Progress is strong in English, mathematics and the sciences. Students on work-related courses also make good progress, showing good initiative in carrying out research tasks.
- The school monitors carefully the achievement of students educated off-site for part of the week. They make good progress in their chosen courses and in their attitudes to learning.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Students make good progress in a range of GCE and work-related subjects and the proportions of students attaining higher grades are rising. Students following GCSE English and mathematics courses make good progress, with many attaining at least a grade C.
- Teaching is good. Teachers show good subject knowledge when working with classes or individual students, challenging them well through the questions they ask and demonstrating the standards expected in good quality examination answers. They plan and provide work that builds well on students' previous learning. In many subjects teachers give detailed written feedback to students, who respond carefully to the comments.
- Students show positive attitudes to their learning and very good motivation. They are kept safe and behave well, collaborate well on group tasks and take an active part in discussions in lessons. Much of their written work is well presented and students clearly take a pride in their work. Attendance rates have improved markedly over the past three years as a result of careful monitoring by staff.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. The curriculum offers an appropriate choice of work-related and academic subjects to cater for a wide range of students, and a high proportion stay on into the sixth form as a result. There are effective arrangements to make sure that students joining the sixth form know what is expected of them, and the proportion of students completing courses is increasingly high. The monitoring of students' progress is well established and any students falling behind in their work are identified quickly.
- Students report that they enjoy the opportunities for personal development offered in the sixth form and feel well prepared for the next stages in their education. They benefit from a detailed programme that prepares them well for university, apprenticeship or further training.

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	137886
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	462123

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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1198
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	345
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Madeline Russell
Headteacher	Rob Watson
Date of previous school inspection	24 April 2013
Telephone number	01767 220000
Fax number	01767 220022
Email address	office@stratton.beds.sch.uk

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