

Sturminster Newton High School

Bath Road, Sturminster Newton, DT10 1DT

Inspection dates 4–5 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership for this rapidly improving school. Strong action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching through the setting of ambitious targets for students' achievement.
- The headteacher, supported by governors and senior leaders, has taken very effective action to address the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. Teaching is now good and leadership at all levels has been strengthened.
- Effective action has been taken to rectify the 2014 dip in English GCSE results. Students' progress has been accelerated and all groups of students are now achieving well.
- Teaching is good and some practice is outstanding. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to make learning interesting and engaging for all students.
- The school's curriculum is reviewed annually to ensure that the range of courses on offer meets the needs, aspirations and talents of all students. Consequently, students are very well prepared for the next steps in their education, employment or training.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. Students are extremely welcoming of difference and the strong culture of respect is embedded across all aspects of the school's work.
- Students' behaviour around the school and in lessons is outstanding. They have a thirst for learning that is typified by very high levels of engagement and enjoyment in lessons. Students are highly motivated to achieve well. Low-level disruption to lessons is extremely rare.
- The extensive range of extra-curricular activities enables students to pursue their love of learning outside the classroom.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students are very happy and feel extremely safe in school.
- Governance is highly effective. Governors are fully committed to the school. They use information about students' progress to hold school leaders to account for the quality of teaching and for students' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Students have too few opportunities to use a range of information to make sure their work is as detailed as possible. Teachers' marking does not always give students enough detail to help them improve their work.
- Not all middle leaders have the confidence to lead their teams without help from senior staff.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 20 lessons to observe students’ learning and behaviour and to evaluate the impact of teachers’ marking on the quality of students’ work. A number of shorter visits to lessons were also carried out to observe the work of teaching assistants when supporting students in classrooms.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors, a representative of the local authority and groups of students from each year group.
- A telephone conversation was held with the school evaluation partner and inspectors took account of reports provided by a range of external consultants.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation relating to other aspects of the school’s work, including the school’s self-evaluation, development plans for the school, records of students’ progress and achievement, behaviour and attendance records and a sample of the records of the work of governors.
- Meetings were held to evaluate the effectiveness of the school’s policies for safeguarding and child protection.
- Inspectors observed students’ behaviour when moving around the campus between lessons and during social times.
- Inspectors took account of the 40 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, two letters from parents received during the inspection and the results of the school’s own survey of the views of parents and carers.
- Inspectors took account of the 42 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire for members of staff.

Inspection team

Caroline Dearden, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth (Liz) Bull	Additional Inspector
Christopher Doherty	Additional Inspector
Janet Simms	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Sturminster Newton High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is lower than average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school serves a very wide, rural catchment area and consequently most students travel to school by bus.
- A small number of students attend alternative education off site at Equilibrium, Future Roots (Rylands Farm) and North Dorset Skills Centre.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The school makes provision for sixth form education in partnership with Shaftesbury School. This provision is registered to Shaftesbury School and was therefore not included in this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide further training and development for middle leaders to ensure that all have the confidence to lead and hold their teams to account without being reliant on senior staff.
- Increase the proportion of students making more than the expected progress by ensuring that:
 - all teachers enable students to use a wide range of information, their own ideas and those of others to check that their work is as detailed as possible
 - marking and feedback consistently challenge students to think about how to improve their work substantially rather than simply to make superficial corrections.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership for this rapidly improving school. Expectations for students' achievement are high and teachers are expected to stretch and challenge all students to achieve their best.
- Middle leaders have been helped to develop their leadership skills. Many initiate programmes of support which accelerate students' progress and enable the sharing of good practice within teams and across the school. However, not all middle leaders yet have the confidence to work independently without being reliant on senior leaders.
- The school's view of its own effectiveness is robust, thorough and honest. The 'no excuses' philosophy of senior leaders is secure across all aspects of the school's work. This means that leaders' plans for improving the school and their departments are detailed and focused on the remaining areas for development.
- The school's procedures for managing staff performance are robust and rigorously carried out. Training for staff is carefully matched to the school's development priorities. Teachers are held accountable for the achievement of the students they teach and any ineffective practice is quickly identified and tackled. The quality of teaching and the strength of leadership are now good.
- The school's systems for tracking and monitoring students' progress have been strengthened. Subject leaders use information about students' progress to check the impact of teaching on outcomes for students. Teachers use the information to identify any underachievement and to remedy gaps in students' learning. Consequently, achievement across different subjects is now good.
- Pastoral leaders track and monitor students' behaviour, attendance and progress. They provide timely and appropriate intervention to raise students' aspirations and to ensure that students enjoy coming to school.
- The school's curriculum is reviewed annually to ensure that the range of courses at Key Stage 4 meets the needs, aspirations and talents of all students. Great care is taken to match students who would benefit from work-related learning to courses which support future employment. The school uses some of its pupil premium funding to provide transport for students where finances would prevent their participation in appropriate education. This is just part of the school's work to promote equality of opportunity.
- Students are supported very well to make informed choices for their futures. This includes help and guidance when making the choices for Key Stage 4 and for post-16 education or training. Independent careers advice begins in Year 7 and continues through to the end of Year 11. Students benefit from a range of activities including work experience, mock interviews, college and university visits and talks from employers such as the armed forces. Students are very positive about the advice and guidance they receive. The proportion of students not in education, training or employment at the end of 2014 was very low. All current Year 11 students have secured places at college, sixth form or in training.
- The school is an exceptionally harmonious place in which to work and learn. The strong commitment of leaders to promote equality of opportunity is reflected in students' complete intolerance of discrimination of any type. Racism and homophobic behaviour are not tolerated and, as a result, students display high levels of respect for each other, for staff and for their school.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very strong and is reflected in students' high aspirations for their futures and the exceptionally strong relationships between all members of the school community. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities enables all students to pursue a love of learning beyond the classroom.
- Students' understanding of the fundamental British values of democracy, tolerance and respect is very strong because it is reinforced across the curriculum and in all aspects of the school's work. There is full participation in the Dorset Youth Parliament, with school council members being selected through hustings and being elected to post by their peers. These activities help to prepare students well for life in modern Britain.
- The pupil premium is well managed and used to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged students. The gap between the achievement of those who are disadvantaged and others in the school is closing rapidly. The Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to support students who fall behind with their reading in primary schools to make the rapid improvements.
- The leadership of safeguarding and child protection is exceptionally strong. Consequently the systems to ensure that students are safe are rigorously implemented and actions taken to protect children are routinely tracked and monitored.
- The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator provides outstanding leadership for this aspect of the school's provision and skilful support from teaching assistants is carefully matched to

individual students' needs.

- There is close liaison between school leaders and the institutions providing alternative education off site. This ensures that students attend their placements regularly, behave well and make good progress.
- The local authority provides good support for the school and regularly challenges leaders to account for the standards achieved by students and the quality of teaching. Very good use has been made of support from external consultants to help school leaders drive and sustain school improvement.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is highly effective. Governors are ambitious for the school and deeply committed to securing a high-quality education for all students.
- Following the last inspection, governors formed specific working groups to support the headteacher and senior leaders to drive forward the work necessary to address the identified areas for improvement. The 'data group' is able to interpret information skilfully about students' achievement and this allows governors to track and monitor the impact of leaders on improving the quality of teaching and managing teachers' performance. Governors ensure that pay increases for teachers are only awarded when the achievement of students is good enough. They have supported the headteacher in making difficult staffing decisions to tackle underperformance.
- Governors are involved in setting the future direction of the school. They have conducted an audit of their own skills and expertise and this has enabled them to match governors precisely to different aspects of the school's work. All governors have links with middle and senior leaders, who are required to provide information for them about the impact of their leadership. Governors hold leaders to account very well.
- Governors have ensured that the school meets all statutory responsibilities. They carefully check the allocation of the pupil premium and understand the impact of spending on promoting equal opportunities, improving attitudes towards learning and on accelerating the progress of disadvantaged students. The school's finances are robustly monitored by governors and verified by external auditors.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Students' behaviour around the school is impeccable. The complete absence of graffiti and litter and the careful way in which they wear their uniform are testimony to students' pride in their school.
- In lessons, students show a thirst for learning. They respond very quickly to teachers' instructions and when asked to discuss their work with others in the class they quickly engage in meaningful conversations with no time lost to off-task chatter. Students are highly appreciative of the way in which feedback from their peers helps them to improve and extend their work. It is supportive and any criticism is constructively focused on why the work is not yet good enough; it is never personal or belittling.
- There are very few rules for students' behaviour. Everyone is expected to be polite, courteous and respectful and, as a result, the strong relationships between all members of the school community are based on empathy and trust. Fixed-term exclusions are very low and there have been no permanent exclusions in the last four years.
- Students who spoke with inspectors said that their learning is rarely affected by low-level disruption in lessons. This was endorsed by the school's behaviour records which show that there have been very few incidents of in-class poor behaviour over a sustained period of time.
- Students know that their views are welcomed by school leaders. They have the confidence to question the work and direction of the school. There is very little beyond being able to take an active part in learning during all lessons that they would change about their school.
- Visual displays around the school, such as the 'bereavement wall', help students to understand why individuals are sometimes quiet or reserved. There is absolute respect for those who face challenging circumstances.
- The school has strong links with Dorset Behaviour Support Service. Students who experience behavioural difficulties are supported to overcome these through short-term interventions or placements at a specialist provision.
- Attendance has improved and is now just above the national average. Leaders take very effective action to ensure that improvements in attendance are sustained.
- Students attending alternative provision off site behave very well and have high levels of attendance.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. The policies for safeguarding students and for child protection are rigorously implemented, including the procedures for recruiting suitable staff and for identifying students who are at potential risk of harm.
- Key staff have been trained to identify the potential signs of child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, radicalisation and extremism. Older students have a very good understanding of the difference between child protection and the actions taken when students fall out with one another.
- Students have an in-depth understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a wide range of situations. Excellent use is made of 'challenge days' to teach students about the risks associated with substance misuse, sexual activity, use of the internet, including social media, and social situations that might make them vulnerable.
- Bullying of any kind is very rare. Students are confident that any incident can be reported to any member of staff and that it will be immediately and effectively addressed.
- Older students have led the school campaign to welcome those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. These students are seen as positive role models and students have a very good understanding of the hurt that can be caused through derogatory language or intolerant behaviour. Consequently, homophobic behaviour, even in jest, is never viewed as acceptable.
- The number of students from minority ethnic heritages is very small and all are fully integrated into social groups. Students learn about different faiths and cultures during religious education lessons and the school's programme of extra-curricular activities is culturally diverse. Racist or anti-social language is not tolerated.
- All students who spoke with inspectors said that they feel happy and very safe when at school. This view is supported by almost all parents.
- The school site is very safe and secure. Improvements to perimeter fencing ensure that visitors to the school are unable to gain access to the areas occupied by students without having their identity checked.
- Students attending alternative education off site are very safe because risk assessments are rigorously carried out and there is very effective communication between the school and the providers.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good across a range of subjects. Relationships between students and their teachers are very strong. Students know that their teachers have high expectations of them and want them to achieve their best. They value the availability of teachers during lunchtime, breaks and in the school holidays. This was typified by Year 11 students who said, 'You don't have to ask for help; it is always there.'
- Students readily engage in learning during lessons. They enjoy the opportunity to talk about what they are learning and use feedback from their peers to enrich and extend their own work. When this is most effective, for example as in a Year 10 English lesson in which students created their own sonnets, students are highly motivated and thoroughly enjoy their learning. However, achievement is sometimes not as high as it could be because students do not always have the opportunity to consider a range of information, their own ideas or the views of others to check that their work is as detailed as it could be.
- Teachers' marking and feedback have improved since the last inspection. Across all subjects teachers consistently provide opportunities for students to reflect upon the advice provided. Where this is most effective, for example as in a Year 10 art lesson where extensive individual feedback challenged students to think about how to improve their work for themselves, students have the necessary self-confidence to make rapid and sustained progress. However, some advice is focused on helping students to correct mistakes rather than extend their learning and this means that achievement is sometimes not as high as it could be.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to question students skilfully about their learning and to identify where students have misconceptions or incomplete understanding. This is a consistently strong feature of English teaching and is well developed across many other subjects.
- Teachers carefully plan learning activities that engage and motivate students. This means that students are interested in and enjoy what they are learning.
- Teaching assistants make a very valuable contribution to students' progress. They have excellent understanding of subject requirements and the skills students need to develop to move to the next level in their learning. Their careful planning and preparation mean that teachers use the approaches that work

well for students with special educational needs even when the teaching assistant is not present.

- The teaching of literacy, reading and mathematics is well established across the school. All classrooms are equipped with specialist equipment such as reading rulers and coloured overlays and this means that no time is lost by students who need to use this equipment to access learning. Very few students require additional support from readers or scribes to complete or to understand the requirements of tests or GCSE examinations.
- Teachers are keen to improve their practice. They value the opportunities to work together to share good practice and new ideas. Consequently, the consistency and quality of teaching have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Homework is an integral part of learning. It is regularly and consistently set across the curriculum and the activities help students to consolidate or extend their learning.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are similar to the national average.
- In 2014 standards were well below the national average in English and this meant that the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was also low. School leaders have used the advice and guidance of specialist consultants to address the reasons for this underachievement. Students are now much better prepared for the demands of written examinations, and information about the progress of students currently at the school shows that they are achieving well across the different subjects.
- Leaders judge that current Year 11 and Year 10 students are on track to achieve higher than national examination results. Inspectors saw strong evidence of students making good progress in lessons and in their written work, consistently good quality teaching and students' excellent attitudes towards learning.
- In 2013, achievement in English was above national levels. Leaders have taken effective steps to restore this position. The subject leader for English now uses information about students' progress to hold teachers to account and to ensure that interventions to address underachievement are carefully tracked and monitored. Almost all students are now making good progress in English.
- The school's data show that students are making good progress in mathematics. The subject leader for mathematics has provided specific and well-targeted support for students identified as underachieving. These students make rapid gains in their learning and quickly develop high levels of mathematical confidence.
- In 2014, almost all of the most able students made at least the expected progress in English and mathematics and all achieved grades A* to C in all subjects. High aspirations are also promoted through visits to highly selective universities. There is a bursary scheme for those who might find it financially difficult to remain in further education. During dedicated literacy lessons the most able students are encouraged to read challenging texts from a range of different types of writing. The most able students currently at the school are making very good progress.
- In 2014, disadvantaged students achieved approximately one grade lower in English and mathematics than other students in the school. Compared to other students nationally, students were one-and-a-third grades below in English and one-and-a-half grades below in mathematics.
- Disadvantaged students now make the same good progress in English and mathematics as others in the school. The gap between their attainment and that of others in the school has been reduced to less than half a grade in both subjects. This is because the pupil premium is used effectively to raise aspirations, promote good attendance and to provide additional help to address any misunderstanding or underachievement.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because they are skilfully supported by teaching assistants to become independent and resilient learners. These students also quickly catch up with the others because specific interventions are carefully matched to their individual needs.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is used very well to enable students with low literacy and numerical skills to make rapid progress. Additional curriculum time has been created for literacy lessons and those with greatest need are taught in very small groups by specialist staff to improve their reading confidence.
- Students are not entered early for their GCSE examinations.
- Students who attend alternative provision make good progress because their courses are very well matched to their needs and talents. Almost all move on to further education, employment or training when they leave the school.

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	113875
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	462480
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	500
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Brierley
Headteacher	Jayne Barron
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 June 2013
Telephone number	01258 472642
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