

Stephenson Academy

Crosslands, Stantonbury, Milton Keynes, MK14 6AX

Inspection dates 24–25 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires Improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
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

- Outstanding leadership has made sure that teaching and achievement have improved rapidly since the previous inspection. Senior leaders, managers and governors have all contributed to the improvements since the last inspection.
- High quality staff training and rigorous checks on the quality of teaching have resulted in most students making good or better progress in English, mathematics and science.
- The majority of students in Year 11 now achieve a wide range of accreditation before they leave the school. These include GCSE passes at A* to G grades and BTEC and entry-level qualifications. These prepare students well for their futures.
- The governing body has an excellent range of skills and knows how well the school is achieving. Governors provide rigorous challenge to leaders about students' behaviour and progress.
- Governors make very effective use of additional government funding. They carefully check that it is used effectively so that disadvantaged students can achieve as well as others and sometimes better.
- Parents told inspectors that the school had turned their children's lives around and that they receive high quality support.
- Students benefit from exciting activities that contribute to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, they visit the Normandy battlefields and a German concentration camp.
- The range of subjects and topics provided meet students' needs and abilities well. Therapies help students to develop the confidence to take part in all that the school offers. As a result their behaviour and personal skills improve rapidly.
- Behaviour is good. Students say that they feel like a big family. One said, 'You help your family and that's what we're like here. We try to help each other.' Students are safe at school.
- Almost all students improve their attendance when they start at the school because they receive effective rewards that they value highly.
- Teaching has improved so that it is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Students' work is marked well with helpful ideas about how they can improve further. They receive effective support from teaching assistants.
- Staff are overwhelmingly positive about leadership and management of the school and their work.
- The sixth form is good. Leaders make sure that students achieve well on their accredited courses.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A minority of students do not make rapid enough progress in English and mathematics.
- A small number of students do not stay in lessons long enough to benefit from the learning provided.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed students' learning in 17 lessons, all jointly with the executive principal or the deputy principal. Inspectors also listened to some younger students reading.
- Inspectors had lunch with students and talked to different groups about their school and about their progress.
- One of the inspectors observed learning and talked to leaders, staff and students at the off-site provision at Bradwell Abbey.
- The inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and the Head of the Academy Trust.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at several documents. These included the school's own information about students' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and students' books.
- Parents attending a coffee morning at the academy spoke to an inspector and shared their views about the school and their child's progress; there were too few responses to the Ofsted online survey (Parent View) questionnaire to be considered. Questionnaires from 20 staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jackie Blount

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This academy caters for secondary-aged students with social, emotional and mental health needs from across Milton Keynes and neighbouring counties. A Pupil Referral Unit, 'Bridge Academy' shares the same site and the same senior leadership team. Bridge Academy was not part of this inspection.
- All students at Stephenson Academy have a statement of special educational need or an Education Health Care Plan. Most students have additional needs including autism spectrum conditions, social communication or moderate learning difficulties.
- Some students have been out of school for some considerable time before they start at the school.
- Most students are of White British heritage and no students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is well above average. This is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children.
- The school also receives an additional sports grant.
- There is off-site provision for six students with the most challenging behaviour at Bradwell Abbey. This is a short term intervention for students at high risk of permanent exclusion.
- The school has its own sixth form. Some students in Key Stage 4 and all sixth form students study vocational courses at Milton Keynes College.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of all students' progress in English and mathematics by making sure that tasks always challenge them to persevere and do their very best
- Develop strategies so that all students stay in class until the end of lessons so that their progress improves.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Outstanding leadership by the executive principal has resulted in excellent improvement in all areas of the school. This has ensured that students now benefit from at least good teaching, helping them to achieve and behave well. The executive principal is very ably supported by three deputy principals, senior leaders, staff and governors. Together they all make sure that students benefit from the improvements to teaching and achievement in an atmosphere that nurtures good behaviour and relationships.
- Governors have very high expectations of staff, who are extremely supportive and work together very well. As a result, students' progress in English, mathematics and science has improved and is now good.
- Staff responses to the inspection questionnaires show that all of them are proud to work at this school and that they value the support they receive from leaders.
- Increased expectations of middle leaders' work means that they, and senior leaders, focus on checking outcomes in their subjects. Middle leaders support their teams very well to be sure that all teachers provide tasks that engage students well. Senior leaders monitor assessments regularly to check that progress is robust.
- High quality improvements to the subjects and topics students study have had a very positive impact on raising achievement across the school. The curriculum is good. A wide range of interventions and therapies support the different needs of students, ensuring that progress is improving.
- Targets set for teachers are linked to predictions for students' achievements so that leaders can be sure that teachers give students challenging work. Increases in teachers' salaries are closely linked to how well their targets are met.
- Students like the school. They were eager to tell inspectors about the wide range of activities that they really enjoy. Many cannot believe that they have opportunities to visit Europe, for example. Their enjoyment of school is shown by the way that most of them improve their attendance at the school.
- Strategies to manage and improve students' behaviour are effective. Students really value the rewards offered for good attendance, behaviour and achievement. As a result, their personal development improves during their time at the school. Students are confident that there is always someone they can talk to if they have any difficulties.
- Students benefit from good opportunities to learn about British values. For example students regularly discuss acceptance of other people. They take part in regular 'cake bakes' to raise funds for a local charity. They have their own school council which takes an interest in improvements to the playground and outdoor areas. They rescued four battery chickens and have nurtured them so that they are beginning to lay eggs.
- The school makes sure that there is equality of opportunity for all students through the effective curriculum. This ensures that students learn about the different cultures and faiths that make up modern Britain. As a result, there is no discrimination at the school and students' attitudes are positive.
- Students are taught about and discuss the prevention of sexual exploitation, extremism and radicalisation in their personal education sessions. Students learn about democracy through their school council. For example, a few students told the inspector that the on-site 'Bridge Pupil Referral Unit' should not share the same site.
- Through the curriculum, students learn about world faiths and about right and wrong. In history, for example, they learned about the impact of the holocaust. A recent visit to one of the concentration camps by Year 10 students promoted high levels of empathy. 'It was awesome standing in the place where so many people died,' commented a student.
- Regular fund-raising activities, residential experiences and close links with the community promote students' understanding of life in modern Britain. Recent visits to the London Shard and to France and Belgium to see the battlefields are well received. These all reinforce promotion of students' personal and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders have developed new systems to measure and monitor the assessment of students' skills. They check these assessments with other similar schools to ensure that they are accurate.
- Leaders visit off-site provision to check rigorously that students' achievement, behaviour and attendance are at least good.
- Parents are pleased with the school and with their child's education. The trustees give good support to the development of the school.
- Students benefit from good quality careers guidance to help them prepare for their futures. Work experience is available to students who feel they would benefit from it.

- Leaders use additional funding for those students entitled to it to provide extra support and resources such as technology. As a result these students make similar or better progress than their classmates in English and mathematics.
- Leaders use the additional sports grant very well to improve staff skills. This has meant that all students benefit from high quality teaching and a rich range of activities. Students regularly go riding, swimming and climbing, for example.
- Safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements. Staff receive regular training to ensure they know how to identify any student at risk of harm. High quality procedures ensure that students are safe. Risk assessments are very thorough and always completed for external activities.

The governance of the school:

- Governance is very effective. Trustees and governors give very good support to the school. Members now have high quality skills and use these very well to challenge and support leaders and to hold them to account for students' achievements.
- Governors know about the strengths of teaching and areas for development. They know how well the school is doing because they check performance data with other similar schools to ensure it is accurate. Members regularly receive information about the performance of staff.
- Financial management is effective. Governors check the effectiveness of additional funding to ensure that students who are eligible benefit from it. This ensures that these students achieve as well as their classmates. Governors also check that the sports funding is being used effectively to benefit students' health.
- Governors understand the procedures for setting targets for teachers and they use these to make sure the best teachers are rewarded and that others receive support to improve their practice.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Most of them behave sensibly and respond well to all that the school offers. Behaviour has improved due to the wide range of therapies that help students to develop positive attitudes and gain the confidence to succeed.
- Most students have positive attitudes. Girls and boys get on well together. They understand the school rules and value the rewards that they receive. Students behave well on trips, visits and when attending off-site provision.
- Students join in with a wide range of activities, working closely with their classmates. The behaviour of a very few students, mainly younger ones, is more challenging but staff always manage it well.
- There have been no permanent exclusions in the past few years. Short-term exclusions are above average for similar schools, which is why behaviour is not outstanding. More exclusions are given to students in Years 8 and 9 because some of them have not yet managed to control their own behaviour. Regular monitoring by leaders and the good quality of support provided ensures that almost all students improve their behaviour and attitudes by the time they leave. This is also due to the way students want to do well at the school. Almost all of them save their rewards for something they want to buy, and they work hard to achieve this.
- School staff and the parents who spoke to the inspectors are positive about students' behaviour.
- The school prepares students well for their futures by helping them to achieve and behave well and by supporting them to attend regularly.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Policies to ensure their safety are securely in place and leaders make sure that all staff adhere to them rigorously. Good risk assessments are in place for any trip or visit and safety procedures at off-site provision are checked regularly.
- Students told the inspector that they are fully aware of the importance of staying safe on the internet and about e-safety procedures. They recognise and understand the impact of risks, which helps them to feel safe.
- Students know about different forms of bullying. They say that the school is like a family. 'Everyone gets on well and helps each other. There is no bullying because there is no need to bully. It is a small enough school for us to get along together,' commented members of the school council.
- Safety is not outstanding because some students told inspectors that the behaviour of a few students is sometimes scary, despite being well managed.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students achieve well in English, mathematics and science. They also make good progress in many other subjects because the impact of teaching over time is good.
- Tasks are well planned to meet individual students' abilities, ensuring that most can complete their work. Regular monitoring of lessons by leaders together with high quality training for all staff means that teaching is effective and has a positive impact on students' successes.
- Students achieve well in a wide range of subjects such as the humanities, art and food technology, to name a few. Expectations of students' achievements are always high.
- Links across subjects are effective due to very detailed planning by staff. For example, the use of literacy and numeracy across subjects such as history, geography and science ensures that students make at least good and sometimes better progress in their literacy and numeracy.
- The teaching of reading, with regular, effective, daily sessions, means that students' reading skills improve rapidly once they start at the school. The range of books provided for students meets their interests well. Students have opportunities to take books home.
- Writing and mathematics are taught well. Teaching assistants play a vital role in supporting students who need extra help. They ensure that students with additional needs and disadvantaged students achieve as well as, and sometimes better than, others in the class.
- Staff manage students' behaviour well and provide tasks that engage most students to do well and enjoy learning. The appointment of reward points at the end of each lesson is carefully discussed so that students are very clear about what they did well and what still needs improving.
- Students' work is marked well with helpful ideas about how to improve further. This is always evident in comments on students' writing, which help them to improve over time.
- Teachers challenge the most able students well with additional tasks. Sometimes these students work independently on the work that teachers set for them.
- Teaching for students with autistic spectrum conditions is good, so that these students make good progress and achieve as well as their classmates.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment is almost always below or well below expected levels for their age when they start at the school. This is due to them missing schooling in the past because of their social, emotional and/or mental health needs. Once at the school they start to catch up, making at least good progress from their original starting points.
- Students eligible for additional premium funding achieve similar GCSE results to others in the school, although their grades are below others nationally in mainstream schools.
- The school's own data show that students make good progress in English and mathematics. Records since the previous inspection show that achievement is improving rapidly. For example, the proportion of students who attained five A* to G grades in GCSE examinations in 2014 was well above other similar schools and all students achieved at least one qualification.
- Tracking of achievement by leaders is rigorous and is helping standards to improve rapidly. All groups of students, including disadvantaged students, those who are eligible for additional funding and those with additional special educational needs, achieve equally well. This is because of high quality support by all staff and the very effective reward system that encourages students to achieve well.
- Students make good progress in reading because of regular practice and the very good quality of resources provided for them. Some Year 8 students read fluently to inspectors.
- Most students improve their writing skills during their time at the school because of effective marking and support. Good examples are provided to help students improve further.
- Some students find writing difficult and at times opt out of these lessons. They are provided with alternative places to work where they are well supported by staff. However, some regularly miss out on working with their peers, improving their personal skills and learning to work together with others to prepare them well for their futures.
- A high focus is placed on students' literacy and numeracy skills through many subjects. The wide range of external visits provides students with ideas and information to support their writing. High expectations of what students can achieve help students to make good progress.
- Some outstanding learning was evident in English where Year 8 students were receiving additional support for their reading and writing. Individual tuition and innovative use of resources helped students to write

with different sized pens and pencils and improve their dexterity and pen control. Individual plans for each student contributed to their high levels of success.

- Sometimes the pace of students' learning dips. At these times some younger students, particularly younger ones, walk out of class, exhibit some poor behaviour and language and do not complete their tasks alongside their classmates. As a result, overall achievement is not yet outstanding. The school provides appropriate provision for these students in quiet areas where they work individually with staff.
- The most able students make very good progress in English and mathematics, working independently and extending their skills.
- Students have many opportunities to take part in sports activities and physical challenges through the additional sports funding. Breakfast and after-school clubs are popular and support students' personal skills well.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Only one sixth form student was present during the inspection because most were out on work experience or attending college. However evidence from past work and from students' outcomes shows that they make at least good and sometimes better progress during their time there.
- Most sixth form students have been in the main school although a few come from other schools. They benefit from a good curriculum and tasks that engage them and prepare them well for college.
- Students' achievement is good because teaching is consistently good for all students, including those with additional special needs and the most able.
- Study programmes match students' needs and abilities well and prepare them effectively for the next stage of their education. Courses are well matched to students' abilities and aspirations. For example, students can take GCSE examinations, BTEC qualifications and/or functional skills qualifications. Most students achieve a good range of accreditation by the time they leave. One student has already achieved 13 GCSE passes.
- Links with Milton Keynes College are good and mean that students can extend their vocational qualifications and their personal development.
- The school provides good, impartial careers advice and information so that students are well aware of the choices that will help them best in their futures.
- Students behave well. They fully understand potential risks to their health and well-being and how to manage these.
- Leaders of the sixth form are rigorous about maintaining good levels of achievement and personal development of students. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

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	138253
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	462390

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Community Special
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	6
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sandra Clark
Executive Principal	Dr. Neil Barrett
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 July 2013
Telephone number	01908 313 903
Fax number	01908 221 195
Email address	reception@stephensonacademy.org.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2015

