

Stowmarket High School

Onehouse Road, Stowmarket IP14 1QR

Inspection dates

23–24 September 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make enough progress to reach national standards across the full range of GCSE subjects in the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not make as much progress as other pupils nationally or their peers in the school, and these gaps are not closing rapidly enough.
- Pupils who enter the school below the national average in English and those who enter above the national average in mathematics do not make the progress they should.
- Promoting reading is at an early stage and is not yet showing an impact in improving outcomes for pupils in English who need to catch up.
- Last year, attendance was too low.
- The school has not improved fast enough since its last inspection. As a result, despite more rapid improvements recently, the school still requires improvement.
- School leaders and governors do not have a sharp enough picture of precisely what needs to improve, including for different groups of pupils.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across different subjects and for key groups of pupils in the school, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning in lessons vary, depending on the quality of teaching they receive. A few pupils do not respond to the school's behaviour code.

The school has the following strengths

- The sixth form is good. As a result of very good guidance and support, almost all pupils complete Year 12 and stay to complete Year 13.
- The school cares well for its pupils and develops them well. Pupils feel safe in school and know how to stay safe.
- Year 7 and Year 8 pupils, who are in the high school for the first time, are being given work in lessons and homework that makes them think hard.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of leaders and managers by:
 - urgently tackling the weaknesses in provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs
 - improving the progress that disadvantaged pupils make
 - clearly defining the roles and accountabilities of all school leaders
 - checking the quality of teaching more rigorously.
- Improve the quality of teaching in order to secure good progress for all pupils by:
 - making greater use of the expertise of teachers currently teaching in the sixth form
 - identifying all underperforming groups and ensuring that they receive appropriate levels of support and challenge
 - promoting reading more effectively, especially for lower-attaining pupils.
- Improve behaviour by:
 - making sure attendance improves for all pupils, but particularly for disadvantaged pupils
 - ensuring that all teachers apply the school's behaviour code consistently and effectively.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

requires improvement

- The actions taken by leaders, including governors, to improve the school since the last full inspection have only recently begun to show an impact. There has been a much faster rate of change in the last term.
- Challenge by governors and the local authority did not ensure that rapid improvement was being secured during 2014. As a result of insufficient action by leaders, the quality of teaching is inconsistent across different subjects and for key groups of pupils. Outcomes for some pupils are not good enough. This is why the school still requires improvement.
- Roles are clear in the new senior leadership team but some gaps remain, which means that these areas are not being tackled quickly enough. These gaps include the leadership of information about outcomes for pupils, including attendance, statutory information on the school website and the provision for disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- School leaders are not making good use of the information that they are gathering about how well pupils are doing, and how often they attend. The school does not have a clear picture of how well important groups of pupils achieve, including lower-attaining pupils, disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs.
- A recently agreed development plan is helping leaders to make better use of information and is identifying how weaker aspects of the school's provision can be tackled. As a result some key weaker areas are covered in the short term. At the time of this inspection, these changes were not securely embedded within the leadership structure of the school.
- Over the past year, the school has made effective use of professional development support from a teaching school alliance, links with a school improvement professional and working with schools in East London. A programme to improve teaching has resulted, including a leading teaching and learning team (LTLT), together with an accurate and highly incisive evaluation of the school which the school has adopted as its self-evaluation.
- The new headteacher has rapidly strengthened the capacity of the senior team. Two seconded leaders, appointed to strengthen leadership, are having a clear impact. Additional internal secondments to the senior team have also been made from existing school staff to provide support for improving teaching, raise attendance levels and increase the uptake of extra-curricular activities.
- The ethos of the school is expanding to promote a culture of excellence in all areas. Staff, through monitoring and performance management, and pupils, through the behaviour code, understand this change in ethos and are working with school leaders to bring it about.
- The shift in ethos led to a greater number of pupils being excluded from school last year. Things have improved: pupils who would have been excluded previously are now being supervised in school and are continuing to learn. This change in approach is reducing disruption to lessons.
- The transition of pupils currently in Years 7, 8 and 9 has been led and managed well by the school. Pupils told inspectors that more is expected of them in lessons and that they are doing harder work.
- The work that Year 7 and Year 8 pupils are doing reflects the greater challenge of the new National Curriculum. Leaders, including middle leaders, have planned this well for the majority of these new pupils in the school. However, more work is needed to meet the needs of those children who enter below the national standards at age 11, especially in reading.
- The curriculum in Year 10 and Year 11 and 16 to 19 study programmes are a strength of the school. Pupils receive effective guidance that enables them to make appropriate choices both at 14 and 16. The school has a strong programme which offers a range of traditional, academic and practical subjects leading mostly to GCSE qualifications but with an appropriate selection of other qualifications. In addition, there are good opportunities for sports, outdoor education, technologies and the arts. The school has a separate practical subjects building on its site that is used well. No pupils currently attend off-site provision.
- School leaders and governors have a broad understanding of how the additional funding they have received for disadvantaged pupils has been spent and its overall impact. They are not, however, as clear about which actions have had most impact. Checks made on the use of this funding are not rigorous enough. The school has not had Year 7 pupils before and so has not received the funding previously to help these pupils catch up.

- Pupils have a strong understanding of how to be healthy, stay safe and respect the views of others. A particular strength is the high-quality information and guidance pupils receive to support them in making appropriate choices at 16 and at 18. As a result, all pupils move to a positive destination post-16 with almost all pupils then undertaking employment with training, including apprenticeships, or moving on to university.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet requirements, as are other aspects of safety in the school. These include pupils' understanding of how to stay safe, particularly e-safety. Areas such as site safety, security and risk assessment are strong. Previously, some aspects of safeguarding were not in place. These included records showing safeguarding training had taken place for all staff and the processes for checking staff. Governors are now ensuring that all checks are made and reported formally to them.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors reconstituted last term and almost all governors now have the skills required to support and challenge school leaders. In the term since the new governing body and the new headteacher have been in post, the focus has been on the business plan and finance. This work has been effective.
 - Governors and the headteacher recognise that the level of understanding that they have previously had about the school's performance has not been good enough.
 - Governors understand the statutory information needed on the website including the new requirements for governors' information. They are aware that at the time of this inspection some of this information was missing from the website.
 - Governors understand and carry out their role in ensuring that processes for the performance management of staff are in place, robust and effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across all subjects and groups in the school is inconsistent. Teaching is improving but more needs to be done in mathematics, science, languages and physical education. Teaching is stronger in technology, health and social care, and humanities. Teaching has rapidly improved in English and teaching in the sixth form is good.
- Variations in the quality of teaching are linked to individual teachers within some weaker subject areas. Some leadership decisions have led to less-able sets and some mixed-ability sets receiving weaker teaching. There are examples where pupils have been given low-level work, such as drawing a picture, when others in the class are improving their writing skills.
- Not all teachers ensure that pupils in their class have made progress over time in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Where teaching is weaker, teachers are focusing on the first two aspects, knowledge and skills, but are not developing pupils' understanding.
- The systematic teaching of reading skills is at a very early stage. Clear plans are already in place, led by the head of languages, to rapidly take all aspects of this forward.
- The presentation of pupils' work has improved but it is still too variable. Work in some subjects, such as technology, humanities and English is usually well presented. In contrast, work in other subjects, including mathematics, is poorly presented.
- Teaching is improving because of higher expectations of what all pupils can do. Middle leaders have ensured that the new National Curriculum for Key Stage 3 has raised expectations in Year 7 and Year 8, although this is less in evidence in Year 9. This is helping to ensure that the two new year groups get off to a good start in secondary school.
- In some subjects, teachers only teach post-16 pupils and their skills and subject expertise are not benefiting younger pupils in the school. Some of these teachers are very effective, which contributes to the fact that teaching in the sixth form is better than in the rest of the school.
- The school has used the national changes in assessment to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve in Key Stage 3. Most teachers are providing useful feedback and guidance for pupils in accordance with the school's approach to marking. These teachers are making use of the information from this feedback, together with their raised expectations to help pupils progress in their next lessons.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very positive and contribute to a strong emphasis on learning. Pupils told inspectors that teachers go out of their way to help them both in lessons and if they ask for extra help outside lessons. They said it is 'one of the best things about the school'. On the few occasions when pupils are not showing positive attitudes to learning, the use of the school behaviour

code by some teachers does not always bring about an improvement in the pupils' attitudes within that lesson.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Safeguarding, while now meeting statutory requirements, has had a very fast pace of improvement. It was identified as a concern by the newly appointed headteacher and actions have been rapid with support from the local authority. The local authority has also supported the school in identifying issues within the provision for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, but many recommendations agreed are still not in place and this needs urgent action by the school.
- Pupils feel safe in school and the school teaches them how to be safe. Pupils explained to inspectors, in some detail, how they stay safe when using mobile phones and the internet.
- The school supports pupils' understanding of current issues such as the dangers of extremism, potential radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. It works closely with a range of external partners, including the police and the health service, to ensure that messages to pupils are seen to represent not just the school but also wider local and national communities.
- Pupils and parents are clear that there is little bullying and few racist incidents in the school, and schools records confirm this. Pupils have a strong understanding of the different types of bullying including homophobic, transgender and cyber bullying.
- Pupils are monitored well in the school's own vocational provision on the school site. At the time of the inspection, no pupils were being educated offsite but school records show that when this is the case, the attendance, behaviour and progress of these pupils are monitored effectively by the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Attendance fell in 2015 to be in line with the lowest 10% of secondary schools. This followed a period of improvement when, by the end of 2014, attendance was in line with the national average.
- Improvements have been made to the way that the school monitors attendance and persistent absence. It checks and follows up any pupils missing from school or with levels or patterns of absence that cause concern. Improved procedures have led to a reduction in absence for some groups, such as disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. However, the attendance of girls and disadvantaged pupils was still low in 2015. Current data show it is improving rapidly for girls but the attendance of disadvantaged pupils is still too low.
- Since the last inspection, exclusions at the school have been broadly in line with national figures, overall and for different groups of pupils. When new expectations regarding conduct and discipline were implemented, over the last academic year, exclusions rose. However, they fell later in the year as internal procedures for isolation within the school were improved.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning vary depending on the quality of teaching they receive. Inspectors saw many examples of pupils managing their own behaviour successfully or responding swiftly when reminded, using the school's behaviour code. On other rare occasions, the school's behaviour code was not used at all, or it was used but did not bring about the change in attitudes needed by pupils.
- Pupils are responding to more demanding expectations for how they conduct themselves, and take pride in their appearance and in their work. Conduct around the school, between lessons, outside and in the canteen is calm and orderly. Some pupils do not take enough pride in their work and are either not reminded or do not respond to teachers' feedback.
- A system of 'form ambassadors' is in place in the school. Pupils told inspectors that this group mainly focuses on charity and fund-raising events. Pupils raised issues with inspectors such as the arrangements for queuing in the canteen at lunchtime and use of the outside picnic tables, but agreed that they had not raised this through the form ambassador process.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' attainment is below the national average when they enter the school. By the end of Year 11 in 2014, pupils' GCSE examination results for five A* to C, including English and mathematics, were in line with the national average. These headline figures mask too much variation across subjects and groups of pupils, and this is why outcomes require improvement overall. There is strong achievement in technology, health and social care, and humanities. Outcomes have rapidly improved in English and outcomes in the sixth form are good. Outcomes in mathematics, science, languages and physical education are improving but there is still much to do.
- In English and mathematics, overall progress has been broadly in line with national figures but there is a more variable underlying picture. Less-able pupils have made less progress than they should in English. The picture is the same for most-able pupils in mathematics. Information for current pupils in the school shows an improving picture but school leaders have not monitored these patterns sharply enough to bring about a faster rate of improvement.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs do not make the progress they should. This is improving but school leaders do not check or evaluate that what is being provided for these pupils, on a day-to-day basis, is leading to more rapid progress.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training. As a result of high-quality guidance, with strong input from local businesses, pupils make informed choices for their GCSE and post-16 courses. Just under half of pupils in Year 11 stay on into the school's sixth form and about the same proportion transfer to local colleges. Information on pupils' destinations at 16 and at 19 show that almost every pupil is in education, employment or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The school's provision for post-16 pupils is a strength of the school. Good leadership in the sixth form sets a strong ethos of success. Pupils are clear from the outset about their targets, what is expected of them in lessons, in additional study outside lessons and in their participation in other activities, in and out of school. A highly effective programme of information, advice and guidance sets high expectations for both outcomes and destinations, which are invariably achieved.
- About half of Year 11 choose to stay on in the school's sixth form. In both 2014 and 2015, almost no pupil left during, or at the end of, Year 12. These levels of retention from Year 12 to Year 13 are exceptionally high and testament to the good personal support that pupils receive in the sixth form.
- Pupils in the sixth form are expected to display and take responsibility for high personal standards for their own conduct, learning and behaviour. Pupils are smartly dressed, as if going to a professional place of work, and adhere to expectations around punctuality, use of music and mobile phones.
- On entry to the sixth form, pupils' GCSE results are broadly in line with the national average. By the end of Year 13 in 2014 and 2015, pupils had made better progress than nationally in both A-level and vocational subjects. Pupils do particularly well in English, biology, physics, design, psychology, health and social care, and media studies. Other popular subjects are chemistry, humanities and mathematics where pupils achieve in line with national averages. It is this consistency, seen across the whole range of subjects, which makes outcomes good in the sixth form.
- The curriculum in the sixth form matches the needs of pupils well and complements other local provision through strong partnerships. The main programme of study is a traditional programme of A-level courses, with a wide range of subjects offered. The level 3 vocational offers, in technology and some applied A-level subjects, are high quality.
- There is a wide programme of other activities in the sixth form, including work experience linked to vocational programmes. Pupils organised and took part in a school election to mirror the parliamentary election earlier in the year. Sixth form pupils are learning mentors to younger pupils, who spoke positively to inspectors about this arrangement. Information from the school also shows the early impact of this work in improving the confidence of the younger pupils in the school.
- Much of what the school needs to do to improve is already in place in the sixth form. Teaching is good but the positive skills and expertise seen in the sixth form, including in science and mathematics, are not shared sufficiently across the rest of the school. Too many of the sixth form teachers teach only, or mainly, in the sixth form.
- Pupils who have not achieved a grade C in English or mathematics GCSE retake this in the sixth form. In

2014, this was about five pupils in English and 18 pupils in mathematics. Of those, all gained a C grade GCSE in English and almost all in mathematics in 2014 and in 2015. Numbers are similar for the current Year 12 and Year 13.

School details

Unique reference number	124818
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10001874

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	978
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephanie Challinor
Headteacher	Mr David Lee-Allan
Telephone number	01449 613541
Website	www.stowmarkethigh.suffolk.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@stowmarkethigh.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–19 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The school makes use of alternative provision from the Albany Pupil Referral Unit and college provision at West Suffolk College. At the time of the inspection, no pupils were attending either of these provisions.
- The school runs its own vocational provision on the school site for about 16 pupils in Year 10 and Year 11.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school has received support from the Kesgrave and Farlingaye Teaching School Alliance. The school has recently begun to make links with Cardinal Pole School in Hackney.
- The school took in Year 8 and Year 9 pupils at Easter 2015. This was the first cohort of Year 8 pupils for the school. The first Year 7 pupils started in September 2015.
- The current headteacher started at the school at Easter 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including information on the school’s website, analysis of the most recent GCSE and A-level results, and plans for future improvement. They also looked at the school’s information about how well current pupils are doing and its records relating to governance, finance, teaching, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors looked at the views of external partners including visits from the local authority, a local authority review carried out in November 2014, notes of visits and a summary evaluation from an external school improvement professional.
- Inspectors looked at the school’s documents on safeguarding including the single, central record. They also looked at the findings and recommended actions from a local authority review on safeguarding in May 2015 and a follow-up report in September 2015.
- Inspectors also looked at a local authority report dated June 2015 on provision for special educational needs in the school.
- Inspectors made 27 visits to lessons, and a further 13 short visits to lessons. Short visits to mathematics and science were carried out with a senior leader in the school. In addition, one senior leader joined an inspector in a science lesson.
- Short visits were made to all classes with pupils currently identified in Year 10 and Year 11 as having a statement of special educational needs or school support.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and looked at their books. They observed and talked with pupils at breaks and lunchtimes and as they moved around the school.
- Discussions were held with four groups of pupils about how well they are doing in different subjects and to gather their views on behaviour and safety in the school. Discussions were also held with senior and subject leaders in the school. In addition, discussions were also held with five governors and a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector also spoke to the external school improvement professional on the telephone.
- Inspectors considered the 52 responses to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire, including three written comments by parents.

Inspection team

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