

Sandon Business and Enterprise College

Sandon Road, Meir, Stoke-On-Trent, Staffordshire ST3 7DF

Inspection dates	12–13 July 2016
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- By the end of Year 11, pupils have made slow progress in several subjects, including science.
- Disadvantaged pupils make slower progress than other pupils in the school and nationally, and attainment gaps are closing too slowly.
- There remains too much variability in the quality of teaching, especially in teachers' questioning and checking pupils' understanding.
- Teachers do not consistently develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- Determined and relentless leadership from the headteacher and senior leaders has led to rapid improvements in attendance, teaching, behaviour and pupils' progress.
- Leaders and governors know the school well and they tackle weaknesses quickly and robustly.
- Other leaders and staff form a united team who are committed to seeing the school improve.
- The wide range of activities outside of normal lessons helps to develop pupils' self-confidence and maturity.
- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Pupils' progress is improving as a result.
- Most teaching is now characterised by strong planning, high expectations and helpful feedback to pupils.
- Pupils enjoy school. Attendance has improved considerably and is now close to the national average.
- Pupils behave well. They are courteous and polite. The school is calm throughout the day.
- Pupils are keen and eager to do well. They are kind to one another and they help and support their classmates in lessons.
- Governors are committed, knowledgeable and determined. They support and challenge leaders very well.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, make consistently good progress in all subjects by ensuring that all teachers:
 - ask pupils questions that make them think hard and so deepen their understanding of their work
 - systematically check pupils' understanding in lessons and then give more help or challenge, as appropriate.
- Accelerate pupils' progress in science by ensuring that:
 - the science curriculum is organised so that teaching gives pupils greater consistency and continuity
 - pupils learn to value and enjoy science.
- Ensure that there is a consistent approach to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher relentlessly models integrity, determination, optimism and ambition for Sandon's pupils. Ably supported by senior leaders and governors, he has secured rapid improvements to all areas of school life. Attendance has improved considerably; behaviour and teaching are now both good and pupils' progress is improving as a result.
- Leaders and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They have detailed and clear plans to tackle remaining weaknesses and they regularly and rigorously check the impact that actions are having.
- Other staff share senior leaders' and governors' determination that the school should continue to improve. An overwhelming majority of staff who completed an inspection questionnaire strongly agreed that the school is well led and managed, and is improving. Several members of staff highlighted senior leadership and pupils' attitudes to learning as particular strengths of the school now.
- The school's subject and pastoral leaders form a strong and effective team. Their roles have been developed well by senior staff so that these middle leaders are increasingly driving the improvements in their areas. For example, new leadership in science is beginning to yield improvements in teaching and pupils' progress, albeit from a very low starting point.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching across the school. They have put into place a comprehensive training programme that includes whole-school issues such as marking and feedback; subject-specific training for departments and personalised support for individuals who need it. Teachers have precise targets that focus on their teaching and pupils' achievement. Many teachers who spoke with inspectors said that they value the investment that the school has made in them.
- The school's curriculum provides pupils with an appropriate range of subjects in all years. Leaders regularly review the curriculum and make changes where they decide they would benefit pupils. For example, leaders are planning to provide more time for the teaching of personal, social and health education (PSHE) from September 2016, so that more detailed content can be covered.
- The formal, taught curriculum is supplemented by a wide and growing variety of extra-curricular activities, following leaders' focus on providing a richer educational experience for Sandon's pupils. In addition to many lunchtime clubs, examples of enrichment activities include a 'young enterprise challenge', visits to universities, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, public speaking competitions, visiting authors and a 'Higher Horizons' careers week for pupils in Year 10.
- The science curriculum currently sees many pupils change teacher every two weeks and these regular changes slow pupils' progress. Pupils told inspectors that they do not like the constant changes and breaks in learning that occur as a result. Whereas pupils are positive about almost all of their subjects, this is not the case with science. Some weaker teaching and lack of continuity result in pupils not enjoying science and not valuing it as much as their other subjects.
- The school's work to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, liberty, respect and tolerance is effective. Pupils who spoke with inspectors explained clearly their understanding of the European Union referendum. Inspectors saw numerous examples of pupils showing respect for each other, and especially for people who are different from them. Together, the school's curriculum and its enrichment activities successfully cultivate pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders spend additional funding, including the pupil premium, wisely. Plans for its use are detailed and well focused on raising standards for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders and governors regularly check on the actions being undertaken. Older disadvantaged pupils are behind their peers because of historic weak teaching and poorly targeted extra help. More recently, pupil premium funded support has helped them catch up to some degree. Good teaching and well-focused extra support have not been in place for long enough, however, to see the attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils close consistently or rapidly.
- Leaders' recent efforts to promote literacy across the school are beginning to show some impact in improving pupils' reading, with an increasing proportion of pupils in most year groups reading at the expected standard for their age. However, teachers are not consistently applying strategies to improve pupils' literacy in all subjects. Neither do teachers consistently develop pupils' numeracy skills, other than in mathematics lessons.

- The local authority has supported the school well over recent difficult years. It has commissioned very effective leadership support from Ormiston Academies Trust. Leaders and governors now commission support from a range of sources, which supports their school improvement priorities effectively.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The interim executive board (IEB) brings considerable expertise and commitment to the school. Governors challenge leaders rigorously about the school's performance, scrutinising information about attendance, behaviour, teaching and progress.
 - Governors carry out their statutory duties with diligence. They ensure that arrangements for managing the performance of leaders and teachers focus well on raising standards. Recently, for example, they have checked that there has been a stronger focus on the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and this is beginning to bear fruit. They regularly check the impact that improvement plans are having, with a careful eye on ensuring value for money. They ensure that all statutory safeguarding requirements are in place.
 - Governors are very much involved in school life. They regularly meet staff and talk to pupils, in order to check that improvements are continuing apace. Together with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the IEB is one important reason that the school's improvement has been so speedy.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The leadership of this area is meticulous. All policies and procedures are in place, fit for purpose and well understood by staff. Staff are knowledgeable and vigilant to potential dangers because they receive regular training and updates. They are confident to pass on any concerns they might have, knowing that they will be taken seriously and that appropriate action will be taken. Procedures to recruit staff safely are in place and used well. Parents who responded to the school's survey indicated that their children feel safe in school and inspectors confirmed this in discussions with many pupils. All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire said that pupils are safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now consistently good in most subjects. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan interesting activities that are well matched to what pupils already understand, know and can do.
- Relationships are strong in lessons. Teachers know and care for their pupils well and pupils, in turn, trust their teachers. Pupils are eager to learn and they often help each other, for example by listening respectfully to each other's views or by maturely discussing their work. As a result, pupils are ready to 'have a go' at challenges and they do not fear making mistakes in front of their classmates.
- Teachers have increasingly high expectations of what pupils should achieve in lessons. For example, in mathematics, a subject that has historically been weak, expectations are much higher and pupils now tackle challenging topics and difficult problems from Year 7 upwards. Similar high expectations are evident in most subjects including English, history, French and physical education.
- Teaching assistants make an effective contribution to supporting pupils in lessons, especially those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors observed several examples of teaching assistants skilfully giving pupils the right amount of help so that they could tackle the work they had been set.
- Teachers apply the school's marking policy consistently and give pupils helpful feedback that means that they know how to improve their work. Pupils are making increasingly good use of their teachers' feedback. For example, in an English exercise book, the teacher had written that the pupil should include direct quotations from texts, with reasons for their inclusion. A few pages later, in the next piece of work, the pupil had done exactly that.
- In most subjects, teachers question pupils skilfully to deepen their understanding of their work. They also regularly check that pupils understand what they are doing and then give extra help or more challenge when pupils are finding the work too hard or too easy.
- Some teaching is less effective. Pockets of weaker practice exist in some subjects including science, geography and music. Where teaching is weaker, teachers do not use questions well to make pupils think. Questions invite only brief answers from pupils who are capable of giving more detailed responses. Teachers also do not check pupils' understanding, so the most able pupils find work too easy and make less progress than they should as a result.

- A recent focus on improving pupils' literacy skills is evident in some subjects. Inspectors observed pupils reading fluently and with confidence in several subjects. However, teachers' development of pupils' literacy skills is inconsistent across subjects. The development of pupils' numeracy skills is currently not evident outside mathematics lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are supportive, caring and kind to each other at Sandon. Inspectors observed pupils sensitively helping and encouraging others with their work in class. As a result, pupils are happy to 'have a go' at new challenges, even when they lack confidence, secure in the knowledge that they have the support of their classmates.
- Pupils are smartly dressed and proud of their school. They are keen to do well and appreciative of the recent improvement in the quality of education they are receiving. They told inspectors that they are optimistic about their future and the school's future.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain when they leave Sandon. A well-organised careers programme helps them to make informed decisions about their next steps. Inspectors observed one day of the school's 'Higher Horizons' careers week, where pupils learned about university life. They had already spent time learning about apprenticeships and were due to spend the next day at local further education colleges. Because of comprehensive careers advice, almost all pupils who leave Sandon move on to further education, employment or training.
- Leaders' focus on enriching pupils' educational experience is helping them to grow in self-confidence and is contributing to their personal development. For example, 23 pupils in Year 9 have just completed their bronze Duke of Edinburgh award, the first to have done so in the school. Inspectors observed these pupils being presented with their awards in an assembly, following which nine more pupils decided to sign up to the scheme.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from a range of potential dangers, including when using the internet. Bullying is rare in the school and pupils told inspectors that they trust members of staff to deal with any that does occur.
- A small number of pupils benefit from attending alternative provision, instead of studying in the school. All such placements are organised through the Stoke-on-Trent Alternative Provision Board. Each pupil has a 'key worker' who regularly checks on their attendance, behaviour, welfare and progress and reports to the school. School staff attend half-termly review meetings to ensure that the placements are successful. Because of this high level of care and checking, these pupils successfully re-engage in learning, attend more regularly and make good progress.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Almost all pupils behave well in lessons and they have excellent attitudes to learning. They listen attentively, work hard and are keen to do well. Low-level disruption is rare and dealt with well by teachers.
- Behaviour between lessons, at break and lunchtime is good. Pupils move around the site sensibly, they are courteous and polite and the school is calm throughout the day. Better behaviour has led to a halving in the number of fixed-term exclusions this year, to broadly average levels.
- Attendance, which was very low, has risen dramatically. An improvement of 4% this year has seen attendance rise to close to the national average for secondary schools. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved by more than that of other pupils, and so the gap between their attendance and that of their peers has closed. Punctuality has also improved considerably this year with the number of pupils arriving late to school more than halving.
- Pupils told inspectors that behaviour has improved in the school, and is now good. An overwhelming majority of staff who completed the inspection questionnaire agreed.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils typically join the school with broadly average prior attainment. Over recent years, because of weak teaching, they have made poor progress and left the school with standards well below national averages. For example, in 2015, just 40% of pupils achieved five GCSEs graded A* to C including English and mathematics, and this placed the school just above the government's floor standard.
- The school's assessment information for Year 11 pupils who have just left the school presents an improving, but mixed, picture. Overall, leaders expect standards to rise, with progress close to average in many subjects including English, mathematics, history, French, art, information and communications technology and psychology. However, the information shows that progress has been weaker in other subjects including geography, product design, German and, particularly, in science.
- Disadvantaged pupils have historically made much less progress than other pupils and gaps between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally have grown. Good teaching and well-focused use of the pupil premium is beginning to see these gaps close, but not yet rapidly, especially for older pupils. The school's assessment information indicates that the standards achieved by disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 will be better than in previous years, and gaps will be smaller, but still large. Disadvantaged pupils in Years 7 and 8 are now making similar progress to other pupils. However, because they join the school with standards below their peers, these gaps are not yet closing rapidly.
- Better teaching over the past 18 months has seen pupils' progress accelerate rapidly across almost all subjects. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 are now making good progress and pupils in higher years, who have experienced more weak teaching, are now catching up.
- The most able pupils are making slower progress than others in most years. However, higher expectations and greater challenge in lessons is seeing these pupils' progress accelerate quickly.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making similar progress to other pupils. Extra support, in lessons and at other times, has helped to compensate for historic weaknesses in teaching and these pupils, along with all others, are now benefiting from good teaching. The school's focus on improving literacy has seen reading improve considerably. Several pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have improved their reading age by more than a year in the last six months.

School details

Unique reference number	124389
Local authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	10010478

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	740
Appropriate authority	The interim executive board
Chair	Caroline Law
Headteacher	Gareth Jones
Telephone number	01782 377 100
Website	www.sandonbec.com
Email address	info@sandonmail.com
Date of previous inspection	14 January 2015

Information about this school

- Sandon Business and Enterprise College is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The majority of pupils attending the school are White British, with a much lower than average proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are supported by the pupil premium. This is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- A very small number of pupils attend courses away from school at Encore, Sporting Stars Academy and Groundwork Independent School.
- The headteacher joined the school in October 2014.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards. These are the minimum standards expected for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons; some of these visits were carried out with members of the school's senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed form periods, an assembly and a careers activity for the whole of Year 10.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour between lessons, at break and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and separately scrutinised a selection of books.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the interim executive board (IEB) and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors considered 63 responses to a staff inspection questionnaire.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, for results to be visible, but inspectors considered the school's own survey of parents' views.
- Formal meetings were held with four groups of pupils and numerous informal discussions with pupils also took place.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed including the school's self-evaluation and plans, school policies, school information about attendance, outcomes, teaching and behaviour, and minutes of IEB meetings.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Buckle	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Broomfield	Ofsted Inspector
Bernice Astling	Ofsted Inspector

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