

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



14 June 2017

Mr Simon Topper
Headteacher
Sandwell Academy
Halfords Lane
West Bromwich
West Midlands
B71 4LG

Dear Mr Topper

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Sandwell Academy

Following my visit with Gwen Onyon, Ofsted Inspector, and Clare Considine, Ofsted Inspector, to your school on 23 May 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

This monitoring inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for inspecting schools with no formal designation. The inspection was carried out because Her Majesty's Chief Inspector was concerned about the quality of leadership and management and its impact on outcomes for pupils in the school.

Evidence

Inspectors scrutinised the single central record and other documents and evidence related to safeguarding. We carried out learning walks with senior leaders in each key stage and met with groups of pupils from key stages 3 and 4 and sixth-form students. Inspectors attended an assembly, visited the library, the careers centre, the inclusion centre and the Willetts Centre. We held discussions with a range of leaders, including the chair and members of the governing body. In these discussions we explored the performance of the school, with a focus on the impact of leadership and management on academic and pastoral outcomes.

Having considered the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time the overall effectiveness of the school remains outstanding.

Context

The number of pupils on roll is almost 1,262, including approximately 321 students in the sixth form. About two thirds of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and almost a third of pupils speak English as an additional language. The level of deprivation among pupils is above the national average and approximately a quarter are eligible for free school meals. Just under 10% of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and of these about 1% have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Pupil stability is above the national average at approximately 95%. Sixteen children looked after attend the school.

Content

You and your leadership team have sustained or improved the school's provision and performance in most key areas since the last inspection in January 2014.

Leadership in the school is assured, confident and responsive. There is absolutely no complacency here. The highly effective and very rigorous systems to monitor and evaluate performance ensure continual improvement.

You and governors of the school have been very explicit about your focus on providing key stage 4 pupils with opportunities to enter GCSE examinations early and to resit them. This has not disadvantaged pupils. This approach is supported by your policy of designing curriculum opportunities for pupils that fully meet their needs. The rationale for this has been to prioritise pupils' individual success and achievement over whole-school league tables. The key stage 4 published performance tables for this school are effectively a reflection of the performance of the large majority of pupils at the end of Year 10 rather than Year 11. Published performance tables indicate that whole-school progress, as measured by the Progress 8 methodology, is just in line with the national average.

Published data indicate that in 2016, 61% of all pupils gained five or more GSCEs, including English and mathematics, at grade C or above. However, the school's best entry data indicates that 79% of all pupils completed Year 11 with these qualifications, including 67% of disadvantaged pupils. In recent years, over 75% of pupils have regularly made what was then the expected progress in English and mathematics. There was a decline in this figure in English in 2015. The reasons for that fall have been thoroughly investigated and effectively addressed. As a result, achievement in English in 2016 improved considerably but continues to be a priority in the school's development plan.

Despite the very strong performance of all pupils, and of individual groups of pupils, there are some differences in performance between individual groups at key stage 4. These differences are most evident between girls and boys and between

disadvantaged boys, particularly the most able, and other pupils nationally. You and your team are aware of these differences and working effectively to diminish them.

Most pupils at key stage 3, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make rapid and sustained progress. The comprehensive testing of pupils when they join the school in Year 7 and the highly effective promotion of literacy and numeracy contribute to the accelerating progress of pupils in key stage 3.

The destination data of Year 11 pupils is above average. Almost all of them gain apprenticeships or places on training programmes or on further education courses.

Sixth-form students said that the early entry and resits approach they experienced at key stage 4 reduced their stress levels, improved their self-confidence, and enabled them to gain higher grades. The last inspection report (January 2014) judged the progress students made in the sixth form as outstanding. Published 2016 results, data about their destinations, and the school's evidence about the achievement of current students leaves no doubt that this is still the case.

You, your leadership team and governors are currently reviewing the early entry and resit policy in response to the changing nature of GCSE assessment regimes nationally. Your intention is clear – to keep the interests of pupils at the forefront of your decision-making.

Pupils' and sixth-form students' well-above-average attendance, routine punctuality, impeccable conduct, and the respect they show for others are a real asset to the school and contributes significantly to pupils' very good learning and progress. This all reflects the school's exceptionally high expectations and hugely effective strategies to promote the highest standards of behaviour. Strong and very well-focused support in school is in place for the very small number of pupils who are in danger of exclusion as a result of poor behaviour

Internal information indicates that the quality of teaching and its impact on learning and progress remain outstanding. This evidence, combined with inspectors' sampling during the inspection, shows that teaching is routinely well planned, takes full account of pupils' different starting points, is engaging, very well paced, and regularly challenges pupils of different abilities to achieve as well as they are capable. Teachers monitor pupils' and sixth-form students' progress tightly and intervene quickly and persistently as appropriate. Leaders' analysis of teaching and learning is excellent, with perceptive and accurate evaluation that feeds into individual and whole-school development opportunities. All staff are accountable in relation to pupils' progress and performance management is well used to recognise achievement and to address underperformance.

The school has had strong and stable staffing since it opened in 2006 and has never had to employ supply teachers. This is the result of a proactive approach to the

recruitment and development of highly effective teachers. It includes strong involvement with initial teacher training providers, highly effective professional development opportunities and thoughtful succession planning.

The curriculum has been developed to inspire and motivate pupils. It reflects fully the needs of pupils and fosters strong social cohesion and a dynamic, 'can do', positive environment in the school. It is underpinned by strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development that includes the consistent promotion of fundamental British values. The school's curriculum, including its focus on careers education, advice and guidance, and strong industry links (including work experience for all pupils at key stage 4 and in the sixth form), provides a breadth of choice and opportunities for all. In many ways, the school helps pupils and sixth-form students translate their hopes into reality. It ensures that pupils leave the school with the qualifications and skills they need to progress very successfully to the next stage of their lives. One sixth former commented, 'None of my friends at other schools have anything like it.'

The school offers a wide range of enrichment activities, opportunities to complete homework and highly targeted intervention and support sessions at the end of the formal school day. All pupils and sixth-form students routinely attend at least one such session per week. Their comments include, 'it's excellent' and 'more productive than working at home'. These sessions have a significant impact on improving the achievements of all groups of pupils.

The curriculum offered meets the needs of pupils with different abilities exceptionally well. Lower-ability pupils follow an appropriate range of level 2 qualifications, including ASDAN, work skills and links with employers, which enable them to progress to successful destinations. Higher-ability pupils are offered a range of opportunities, including links with Russell group universities and dedicated support for students aspiring to the legal and medical professions.

Pupils feel very safe in school. All safeguarding requirements are met. Vulnerable pupils, including those who are children looked after, receive strong and well-planned support and guidance. A strong safeguarding culture is evident in the school and safeguarding issues are fully threaded through the curriculum.

A very well-informed governing body holds you and your staff rigorously to account, while also supporting you very well. Governors have very high expectations of pupils, staff and leaders. They aim to ensure that the school is a place where all achieve as well as they are able.

Few responses are recorded on Parent View but the school's own regular surveys of parents are hugely positive. The fact that the school is heavily oversubscribed reinforces parents' glowing views about this school.

External support

As a member of the Thomas Telford family of schools, Sandwell Academy benefits from close collaboration and a shared vision and ethos. Regular sharing of expertise and good practice takes place as well as moderation of assessment. This benefits teaching and learning and contributes to the robustness of assessment in the school. Support is a two-way process – the school provides support to others and receives support when needed.

Priorities for further improvement

Continue the school's work to improve the achievement of boys so that it matches that of girls in the school, and the achievement of disadvantaged boys, particularly the most able, so that it is in line with that of other pupils nationally.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sandwell. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates

Her Majesty's Inspector