

Stowmarket High School

Onehouse Road, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1QR

Inspection dates

4–5 July 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too variable. There are examples of very effective teaching that help pupils to make strong progress. However, this is not yet typical across the school.
- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. They do not routinely provide activities that engage pupils and challenge them to fulfil their potential.
- Leaders have not ensured that strategies are used consistently well by teachers to support pupils' learning. Consequently, these are not having the maximum impact on pupils' learning and progress.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students following A-level courses have not made the progress of which they are capable.
- A minority of pupils are frequently absent from school. As a result, persistent absence remains above the national average.
- A small core of pupils' behaviour disrupts the learning of others in a minority of lessons.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and other leaders have established a common purpose and vision. They have secured improvements across the school since the previous inspection.
- The large majority of pupils behave well and are polite and considerate. Behaviour is improving across the school.
- Sixth-form students who complete vocational courses make better progress than similar students nationally.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' personal development and welfare are well catered for. Pupils and parents and carers appreciate the support that the staff provide.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced. Consequently, more pupils are successfully moving to the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Leaders' more focused approach to the use of additional funding is improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to further improve pupils' achievement, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have high expectations of all pupils, including those who have SEN and/or disabilities
 - use the school's chosen strategies to improve pupils' learning and understanding
 - provide appropriately challenging activities that help pupils to make strong progress.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and attendance by:
 - improving the behaviour of a small core of pupils to eradicate the remaining instances of low-level disruption of learning
 - improving the attendance of pupils who join the school with high rates of absence.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that leaders use their monitoring activities to check that planned actions are being implemented consistently and are making the difference intended.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, the determined and highly respected headteacher has successfully ensured that leaders at all levels have a shared vision and are working with a common purpose. Appointments made to leadership positions have resulted in a more effective leadership team that has secured some improvements in pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Some actions have not been in place long enough to address the inconsistencies that remain, which is why the school requires improvement.
- Parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, were very positive about the headteacher and the leadership team and the improvements made since the previous inspection. One comment that reflected the views of a number of parents is, 'The whole of the school staff have worked incredibly hard to make some very difficult changes to the school which have had a positive impact'. Parents largely feel that communication is good and that they are well informed about the school's work. Several commented that the recently introduced parents' forum gave them opportunities to share their views, which they feel leaders listen to.
- Leaders have strengthened systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Regular checks on the work of teachers ensure that leaders have a clear view of the strengths and areas for development of individuals. Teachers, including those new to the profession, are very positive about the training and development that they receive in order to improve their practice. Teachers say that the school is a strong community where they can ask others for help and support. However, when needed, leaders do not shy away from taking action to address underperformance. As a result, the quality of teaching in the school is improving.
- Subject leaders and heads of year are clear about the increased role that they play in improving the school. Heads of year have had a clear focus on improving behaviour and attendance, which has resulted in positive changes. Subject leaders are able to accurately comment on the performance of different pupil groups and the relative strengths and weaknesses of their areas of responsibility. They use this knowledge to identify priorities for improvement and put appropriate actions in place.
- The curriculum is adapted to meet the needs and abilities of different groups of pupils. They are able to study a broad range of subjects. Pupils are appreciative of the advice that they receive when choosing the subjects that they will study in key stage 4. The 'focused pathway' provides additional support in literacy and numeracy skills for those pupils that need it. Leaders make appropriate use of alternative provision for a small group of pupils, which helps most of those involved to remain in education and successfully achieve qualifications. The effective curriculum has reduced the proportion of pupils who are not in education, employment or training when they leave school.
- Leaders ensure that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well provided for throughout the curriculum. All year groups have timetabled lessons that cover aspects of citizenship, personal development, religious education and careers and financial education. Assemblies and form-tutor activities supplement this programme. Pupils participate in the democratic process through electing members of the school

council, which plays an active role in the life of the school. A range of extra-curricular clubs, trips and activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, allows pupils to pursue and develop their personal interests. These activities are ensuring that pupils are developing the skills required to be well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- School leaders make judicious use of external support to improve the quality of provision. For example, English, mathematics and science leaders have worked with colleagues in a teaching school alliance to improve the accuracy of assessment. Leaders used an external review of the sixth form to confirm their views on what needed to change and acted swiftly on the recommendations made.
- The additional funding to support those pupils who did not achieve the standards expected for their age at the end of key stage 2 is used well. The programme of support that leaders provide is helping these pupils to make progress in literacy and mathematics. Most are now catching up with their classmates.
- Leaders are aware that additional funding has had less of an impact on improving the achievement, behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. The leader with responsibility for both of these aspects of the school's work has carefully targeted support so that it addresses individual pupils' barriers to learning. There are now clear ways of measuring how effective the actions that are in place have been. Inspection evidence indicates that although outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving and more pupils are making strong progress from their starting points, this is not yet the case for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Leaders have rightly identified the link between pupils' previously poor attendance and behaviour and their underachievement. Leaders are taking effective action to improve behaviour and dramatically reduce incidents that lead to fixed-term exclusions. They have also taken effective action to improve attendance. The attendance officer closely monitors attendance and challenges and supports pupils and their families where attendance is low. Leaders recognise that more work is needed to improve the behaviour and attendance of a small core of pupils.
- Leaders have put in place appropriate actions and policies to address their priorities for improvement. However, some are not consistently followed or fully embedded. Therefore, they have not had the maximum impact on bringing about improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and raising pupils' achievement.

Governance

- The governing body has undergone changes since the previous inspection. Governors have made good use of available support and training to become increasingly effective in their role.
- Governors are providing increasing challenge to leaders regarding the difference that planned actions are making to improve pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school. They have an accurate view of the strengths of the school and the improvements that are still required.
- Monitoring of the use of additional funding provided for vulnerable pupils has increased and governors are now ensuring that leaders are using it more effectively.
- Governors play an active role in determining the strategic direction of the school. They

have been diligent in their consideration of conversion to academy status and monitoring of finances.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors ensure that keeping pupils safe from harm has a high priority in the school. Arrangements for ensuring that adults are suitable to work with children and young adults are thorough. Governors regularly check that leaders have carried out all of the necessary pre-employment checks on adults working in the school.
- Adults working in the school receive regular and appropriate training, including on the 'Prevent' duty, which focuses on preventing pupils becoming vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism. They are aware of their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe and are clear as to how and when they should pass on any concerns.
- The designated safeguarding leader and safeguarding team have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They respond swiftly to concerns and ensure that pupils and their families receive the support that they need. Leaders work effectively alongside outside agencies, such as social services, to support pupils.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. The very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree. Pupils learn how to stay safe, including when working online and using new technologies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving quickly. There are examples of some highly effective teaching that helps pupils to make strong progress. However, there is still variability within and between subjects. This results in some pupils, and groups of pupils, not making the good progress needed to make up for a legacy of weaker or interrupted teaching in the past. This is why teaching requires improvement.
- Teachers' high expectations of pupils are not consistently evident. As a result, pupils' poor presentation goes unchallenged by some teachers. The same pupils respond well to other teachers and their work shows detailed care and attention, which supports their learning. Similarly, many teachers are clear about their expectations regarding pupils' focus on learning activities. They challenge pupils when their attention drifts away from learning and pupils respond and go back to the task, ensuring that meaningful learning takes place. However, some teachers allow pupils to disengage from learning and do not take steps to address this, which hinders pupils' learning and progress.
- Some teachers do not use information about what pupils know and can achieve to routinely ensure that pupils tackle appropriately challenging learning. As a consequence, the progress that pupils make is inconsistent. An example was seen in mathematics, where all pupils were allowed to complete the same task, even though this was too easy for a number of pupils and was not challenging them to extend their learning. Examples were seen in science, where pupils were being stretched in biology

to deepen their understanding and their learning, but were being allowed to provide brief, superficial answers in physics.

- Aspects of teachers' questioning are highly effective and require pupils to think more deeply. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, a teacher's skilful questioning, with opportunities for pupils to reflect upon and discuss their ideas, helped pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the text that they were reading. This is not yet evident across the school. For example, inspectors saw examples of questioning that did not check what pupils already knew, or where teachers gave little time for pupils to produce anything other than a simple response.
- Additional adults are deployed well to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Teachers are now provided with more detailed information about what strategies they should use to overcome individual pupils' barriers to learning. This is helping to increase the progress made by individuals, but this group is not yet making consistently good progress.
- Pupils confidently apply what they have learned in mathematics in other subjects, such as science. Teachers also provide opportunities for pupils to read, and reading has an increased profile across the school. Weaker readers receive effective support to develop their reading skills.
- Teachers provide more consistent levels of challenge to the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, than they do to other groups of pupils. This is contributing to the good progress that current pupils in this group are making.
- There are areas of very strong practice across the school. Highly effective teaching in product design and health and social care helps pupils to consistently achieve well. Improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in mathematics resulted in pupils making much improved progress at the end of key stage 4 in 2017.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, feel that pupils are well cared for and happy in the school. This reflects the views of almost all pupils. One sixth-form student reflected the views of many others when he spoke of the school's homely atmosphere. Pupils are confident that they can go to an adult should they need help or advice. Many spoke of their helpful, supportive teachers. Pupils' emotional well-being is supported well, as shown by a recent mental health initiative.
- Most pupils report that teachers and pastoral staff deal with bullying swiftly. A number of parents commented on how teachers had effectively dealt with potential bullying situations and, 'nipped them in the bud'. Pupils show a good understanding of most forms of bullying and the harm that it can cause. Their understanding of homophobic bullying was less well developed. Pupils had mixed views as to whether incidents of homophobic bullying were more or less likely to occur in the school than other forms of bullying. Leaders' analysis of incidents does not currently identify patterns or trends in

bullying that they could use to inform and evaluate their work.

- Teachers support pupils well when they join the school in Year 7. Pupils appreciate that they have their own area where they can mix and get to know one another while they get used to the differences that come with being in a secondary school.
- Parents and pupils speak positively of the advice and guidance that they receive when choosing options for study at key stage 4. Taster sessions, parents' information evenings and guidance on future careers help pupils to make informed choices.
- Work experience for Year 10 pupils enables them to gain an awareness of the world of work and employers' expectations. Pupils also receive careers education as part of their personal, social and health education programme. Leaders have developed links with employers and local businesses and these are especially strong in some subject areas, such as product design and health and social care. There are ambitious plans to strengthen this aspect of the school's work further in the coming year.
- Pupils have opportunities to take on roles and responsibilities as form representatives, members of the school council, librarians and student receptionists. Pupils also contribute to the local community through charity fund-raising events. A variety of after-school clubs, trips, sports teams and activities contribute to pupils' personal development.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils generally move around the school site in a calm and orderly manner. Lunchtimes and breaktimes are sociable and typify the amiable, positive relationships that exist in the school. Pupils are typically polite and courteous to one another, teachers and visitors.
- Teachers and pupils say that behaviour has improved since the previous inspection. The number of pupils excluded from school has reduced significantly. Pupils have a good understanding of the behaviour and rewards system that is in place. They feel that this has contributed to improved behaviour, as has the use of the supervised exclusion room, which pupils see as an effective deterrent.
- Pupils report that there are still instances where their learning is disturbed by the behaviour of others. Often this is due to pupils calling out, talking when the teacher is talking or off-task, silly behaviour. Pupils say that this is due to a small number of pupils. Leaders have also identified that this is the case and are working to improve the behaviour of those individuals involved.
- Pupils' attendance improved significantly in 2016 and figures for 2017 show that attendance moved closer to the national average. A number of pupils who join the school mid-year, with a record of poor attendance in their previous school, have a negative impact on the school's overall absence and persistent absence figures. There is evidence that the longer pupils are at Stowmarket High School, the better their attendance becomes. However, to reduce persistent absence, leaders acknowledge that they particularly face the challenge of improving further the attendance of those pupils who join the school with previously high levels of absence.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils arrive at the school with attainment that is below that of pupils nationally, and in some cases significantly so. Pupils currently in key stage 4 joined the school during a period of re-organisation of secondary education in the area, having spent some time in middle schools. While outcomes overall are improving, progress in some subjects has remained significantly below the national average. Some current pupils are not making the progress that they should across a range of subjects because not all teachers' expectations are consistently high. Some teachers do not provide learning tasks that routinely challenge pupils to fulfil their potential. This is why outcomes require improvement.
- Outcomes at the end of key stage 4 improved significantly in 2017. Pupils made broadly average progress overall. However, this masked some significant variations in progress. Pupils achieved well in mathematics and made progress that was significantly better than that of pupils nationally. However, in languages, pupils made significantly less progress than pupils nationally and this was also the case in 2016. The progress current pupils are making in languages is too inconsistent.
- Disadvantaged pupils have made significantly less progress than other pupils nationally over the past two years over a range of subjects. In 2017, there was some improvement in rates of progress for this group. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that this improvement is continuing, with most of this group making progress that is in line with that of other pupils in the school who have similar starting points. Leaders have identified that lower attaining disadvantaged pupils are not always making progress at the same rate as their classmates and have taken action to address this.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities did not make the progress that they should have by the end of key stage 4 in 2016 and 2017. The recently appointed leader for SEN has ensured that pupils' individual learning needs are accurately identified and that they are now receiving the help that they need. There are examples of current pupils who are making strong progress, but this is not yet the case for all pupils.
- Lower attaining pupils have not made the progress that they should over the past two years. Progress for current pupils is typically stronger, but there are some variations where teachers do not match learning activities to what pupils can do.
- The most able pupils have made broadly average progress across a range of subjects. Current most-able pupils are making strong progress in a range of subjects because teachers now provide them with challenging activities.
- The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision complete qualifications that meet their needs and aspirations. Leaders make regular checks on their progress, attendance and well-being.
- Pupils who did not achieve the standards expected at the end of key stage 2 improve their literacy and numeracy skills in key stage 3. Inspectors heard pupils reading with confidence, showing understanding of what they had read, including those who had not attained the standard expected for their age at the end of key stage 2.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Leaders accurately identified that students completing A-level qualifications have not achieved as well as they should have done in recent years. They commissioned an external review of the sixth form to confirm that their evaluation was correct and to seek advice on their priorities for improvement. They acted swiftly on this advice and have put in place appropriate plans.
- The recently appointed leader of the sixth form has an accurate view of the strengths of the provision and what needs to be improved. Like other leaders, he is open and honest in his evaluation. As a result, the actions already in place and plans for improvement address the correct priorities.
- Previously, students did not embark on courses that were best suited to their ability or future aspirations. As a result, students on A-level courses have not achieved well in recent years. Current leaders have acted to strengthen the advice and guidance that students receive prior to choosing their programmes of study. This has resulted in current students making better progress on their A-level courses.
- A variety of activities support students' personal development and welfare. However, leaders acknowledge that currently this programme lacks sufficient structure, which leads to variability in its quality. There are plans in place to deliver a more structured programme from September 2018.
- Students are positive about the support that they receive to apply for university places or secure apprenticeships. However, they feel that their parents could be more involved in the process.
- Leaders acknowledge that previous checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment were not regular or rigorous enough. This led to variability in quality. There are now regular checks that ensure that leaders have an accurate view of where teaching is effective and where improvement is needed. Current students are positive about the teaching that they receive in a range of subjects.
- Students who complete vocational courses achieve well. They have made more progress than similar students nationally for the past three years and evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that this is set to continue.
- Those students who did not achieve a GCSE at grade 4 or 5 (formerly grade C) in mathematics are supported to improve on their grades. Leaders provide opportunities to successfully complete alternative, equivalent courses for those students who struggle to achieve a GCSE at grade 4 or 5.

School details

Unique reference number	124818
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10036271

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	856
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	136
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephanie Challinor
Headteacher	Dave Lee-Allan
Telephone number	01449 613541
Website	www.stowmarkethigh.suffolk.sch.uk
Email address	enquiries@stowmarkethigh.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 September 2015

Information about this school

- Stowmarket High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The very large majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN is lower than the national average. However, the proportion who have a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The school makes use of alternative provision for a small number of pupils through the Albany Pupil Referral Unit, Olive Academy and West Sussex College.

- The school receives support from a standards and excellence officer from the local authority. Leaders have also made use of links with the Kesgrave and Farlingay Teaching School Alliance and ConnectED Teaching School Alliance to support English, mathematics and science. The school has also commissioned support from the Hackney Learning Trust, which included a review of the 16 to 19 study programmes in 2017.
- The school is due to join the Waveney Valley Academies Trust in September 2018. Links have already been established with the trust. The chair of the governing body sits on the trust and the headteacher has joined the trust's executive leadership group. The trust has carried out a review of leadership and management in the school.
- The headteacher took up the post in 2015. Since his appointment, he has developed new leadership structures in the school. In the academic year 2016/17, there was a significant re-structure of staff. Prior to September 2015, pupils joined the school having spent Years 7 and 8 in middle schools.
- Following the school's previous full inspection in September 2015, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors carried out monitoring visits to the school in March 2016 and April 2017.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards. These set the minimum expectations of pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across all key stages and in a range of subjects. Almost all of these observations were carried out jointly with school leaders. Inspectors also heard pupils read, visited form periods, scrutinised pupils' work and spoke to pupils about their learning when visiting lessons.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documents, including assessment information, evaluation of the school's performance, improvement plans, attendance and behaviour records, and information relating to leaders' checks on the quality of teaching. Inspectors also scrutinised a number of the school's policies and procedures, including those relating to safeguarding.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer from the Waveney Valley Academies Trust. Inspectors considered the 42 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and held formal and informal discussions with teachers to gain their views on the work of the school.
- Formal meetings were held with groups of pupils from each key stage. Inspectors also spoke to pupils in lessons and at informal times, such as lunchtime, to gather their views on the school. There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. At the time of the inspection, there were no Year 11 or Year 13 students in school.
- Inspectors analysed the 58 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and considered the 57 free-text comments provided by parents.

Inspection team

Paul Wilson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Hutton	Ofsted Inspector
David Piercy	Ofsted Inspector
Cathy Tooze	Ofsted Inspector

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