

Stanborough School

Lemsford Lane, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL8 6YR

Inspection dates

30 April – 1 May 2019

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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Key stage 4 pupils made too little progress in 2017 and 2018. Their attainment at GCSE, including in English, mathematics and science, was too low.
- Over time, governors have not challenged leaders to improve standards in aspects of the school's work effectively enough.
- Some subject leaders have not ensured that the most effective teaching techniques are taken up by all staff quickly enough. The effectiveness of teaching varies both within and between different subjects.
- Some teachers do not use the information they have about what pupils already know to plan activities that are appropriately challenging.
- Questioning and other techniques are not used consistently enough to help teachers assess pupils' understanding, and to challenge pupils to deepen their thinking.
- The extent to which teachers follow leaders' expectations when giving feedback to pupils is too variable. As a result, pupils do not always know how to improve their work or are not given the timely opportunities to do so.
- Standards in respect of pupils' behaviour, attendance and punctuality have declined since the previous inspection. A small number of pupils do not work hard enough. Some teachers' expectations of them are too low.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher is working at pace with other leaders and governors to raise standards. Pupils are making better progress because of rapid improvements in their attendance, behaviour and the quality of teaching
- Teaching within art, history, modern foreign languages and physical education is particularly effective. Key stage 3 pupils are making very strong progress in mathematics.
- Leaders' adjustments to the curriculum have ensured that it is both broad and balanced.
- Pupils benefit from helpful careers education and guidance. Their personal development is promoted well.
- Pupils are safe and well looked after at school. They appreciate the culture of mutual tolerance and respect. As one pupil commented, 'It's OK to be different here.'

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the variability in achievement across and within subjects, and improve both behaviour and the effectiveness of teaching further, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan tasks that are at the right level of difficulty for all pupils, particularly the most able
 - use questioning and other techniques to assess pupils' understanding and to challenge them to think deeply
 - provide pupils with the opportunity to respond to clear feedback on their work, in line with the school's policy
 - insist on high expectations in respect of all pupils' effort, conduct, attitudes to learning and work completion.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers in driving improvement by ensuring that:
 - all subject leaders improve teaching and pupils' progress through the sharing of good practice
 - governors continue to develop the ways in which they hold leaders to account for standards in different areas of the school's work.
- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have not addressed declines in pupils' behaviour, attendance and progress swiftly enough. In 2017 and 2018, pupils' progress and attainment by the end of key stage 4 was too low.
- Over time, some middle leaders have not been effective in maintaining standards within their subjects. Although the school's assessment information shows that current pupils are making better progress in most subjects, inspection evidence indicates that pupils' achievement remains too variable.
- The extent to which teachers provide feedback in line with leaders' expectations is too variable. As a result, pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their work, or are not given sufficient opportunities to make the necessary changes.
- Since the beginning of the current academic year, the newly appointed headteacher and other leaders have taken determined and highly effective action to raise standards, based upon their accurate evaluation of what needs to improve. Pupils' behaviour, attendance and the impact of teaching, learning and assessment upon their progress are all improving strongly.
- Senior leaders are monitoring the effectiveness of teaching carefully and taking robust action if standards are not high enough. Some difficult decisions have been made. Teachers are benefiting from precisely targeted training. This is enabling many to make the necessary improvements or to develop further already strong aspects of their practice. The extent to which subject leaders ensure that effective approaches are adopted swiftly by all is too variable.
- The school's curriculum is very broad, but some pupils have made insufficient progress because they have studied a greater number of GCSE subjects than pupils typically undertake. This has meant that the amount of teaching time allocated for some subjects has been too low. The headteacher's recent changes to the curriculum have ensured that pupils receive sufficient tuition in all subjects that they are studying.
- Leaders are making checks that confirm the accuracy of teachers' assessment of pupils' work and are ensuring that pupils' progress is carefully monitored. Leaders use this information to provide additional help for pupils, including for those who have gaps in their knowledge and understanding due to previous weaknesses in teaching.
- Leaders have a very detailed understanding of the individual barriers to learning that are faced by many of the school's disadvantaged pupils. They are using pupil premium funding to address these barriers more effectively than in the past. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' behaviour and attendance has improved markedly. The difference between these pupils' progress and that of others with the same starting point is diminishing.
- Leaders identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and ensure that staff know these and have the knowledge and resources they need to meet them. Most are making good progress academically from their individual

starting points as a result. The personal development needs of pupils with SEND are also well promoted.

- Leaders are using additional funding in a well-targeted manner to help pupils in Year 7 who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.
- The curriculum helps to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education well through trips, visits and other activities. The religious studies and philosophy course that pupils study makes a significant contribution to enabling all pupils to understand and respect people with different backgrounds, views and beliefs.

Governance of the school

- Until recently, governors have not challenged leaders sufficiently well to help prevent standards in teaching, behaviour and attendance from declining.
- Governors have made recent changes to the way that they work. These are starting to ensure that they receive more timely and accurate information about standards within various aspects of the school's provision.
- Recent changes to the composition of the governing body, together with additional training, have ensured that members are developing the understanding they need to be able to hold leaders to account.
- Governors are developing an accurate understanding of the school's most significant improvement priorities, and how far progress towards the school's improvement plan objectives is being made.
- Governors are ambitious for the school and are providing strong support for the headteacher and other leaders as they improve standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders carry out all necessary pre-employment checks to establish that staff are suitable to work with pupils. The school's single central record meets all statutory requirements.
- Senior leaders have a secure understanding of local contextual safeguarding risks. They make sure that through visiting speakers, assemblies and drama productions, pupils learn about risks and how to avoid or minimise them.
- Leaders update staff regularly about safeguarding issues. Because of this, staff are quick to identify changes in a pupils' appearance, behaviour or attendance that might indicate a concern. Staff act quickly to report anything that worries them, following the school's clear procedures.
- Staff work with alternative providers well to ensure that the small number of pupils who attend off-site educational establishments are kept safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Although improving, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not

consistently good. There is too much variation in the effectiveness of teaching across and sometimes within subjects. Consequently, the progress that pupils make is too variable.

- Some teachers' expectations of what all pupils can do, or how much effort they should make, are too low. When this is the case, a minority of pupils do not work hard and complete the tasks that they are set, and this is not challenged.
- Too often teachers do not use their understanding of what pupils know to plan tasks that provide pupils with appropriately challenging work to do. Sometimes this means that the most able complete work that is too easy, or that pupils are moved on to the next task before their understanding is secure enough.
- At times, teachers do not use questioning to develop pupils' thinking during the completion of a task, or to check the extent of their understanding before they start work or after they have finished it. When this is the case, or when tasks are not engaging, a small number of pupils sometimes engage in off-task discussion or disruptive behaviour.
- Some teachers do not follow the school's policy when giving feedback to pupils. As a result, pupils are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their work, or are not given a timely opportunity to make the necessary changes.
- Overall, the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment has improved significantly since the start of the current academic year. Leaders have been clear about what has needed to improve and have provided support that is enabling teachers to make the necessary changes.
- Pupils benefit from teachers' strong subject knowledge and the typically positive and productive working relationships that they have with staff and with each other. In subjects such as English and history, this encourages pupils to engage in discussions and to deepen their thinking by responding to challenging questions.
- In a number of subjects, including art, history, modern foreign languages and physical education, teachers use their knowledge of pupils' prior attainment to plan appropriately challenging activities that help them to take the next steps in their learning. Learning is lively, engaging and productive.
- Typically, teachers help pupils to develop their subject-specific vocabulary. Key stage 4 pupils told inspectors that they value the precise guidance that their teachers give them about how they can best demonstrate their knowledge and understanding when answering public examination questions.
- Often, teachers encourage pupils to learn from their mistakes, and to redraft aspects of their work in response to feedback. Teachers also encourage pupils to test their ideas out during discussions, even if they are unsure about them. This helps teachers to identify any misconceptions, which they then address.
- Additional adults provide effective support for pupils who need it during lessons, or in additional catch-up or intensive one-to-one sessions. Pupils who join the school with low levels of literacy are benefiting from precisely targeted support which is helping most to improve their vocabulary and ability to use spelling, punctuation and grammar with accuracy.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils benefit from engaging in a particularly wide range of clubs, sporting activities and educational trips and visits. Music is a particular strength, including the large boys' choir. Many pupils write and perform their own plays or dance routines and engage in house competitions.
- Many pupils raise issues through their school and year councils, and leaders often involve pupils in reviewing or creating school policies and procedures. The recently-introduced behaviour and rewards policy was written following extensive pupil input and consultation, for example.
- Pupils who need additional help or an alternative timetable are well supported in the school's inclusion unit, 'The Compass'. This provision meets the needs of individual pupils, so that they can learn with the minimum of disruption. The school's Young Carers group provides effective help for pupils who look after relatives. These pupils spoke particularly appreciatively about this support to inspectors.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school and respect each other. They report that bullying, including racial or homophobic bullying, does not happen very often, and that staff typically deal with it well when it does occur. The school's monitoring information supports this view.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe, including when using the internet. Teachers ensure that pupils understand the risks involved in drug and gang related 'county lines' activity. Staff take appropriate action to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism on the rare occasions when that is necessary.
- Independent careers guidance, work experience and work-related learning help pupils to make well-informed choices about which subjects to study and the kinds of courses and careers that successful completion of them could lead to. The proportion who go on to sustained employment, education or training after leaving school is above the national average.
- Leaders ensure that the relevant checks are carried out upon the attendance, behaviour and safety of the small number of pupils who attend off-site alternative provision.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. A minority of pupils have poor attitudes to learning. They do not always work hard enough and complete the tasks that their teachers give them. Some teachers do not challenge these pupils to work harder. As a result, they make less progress than they should.
- Typically, pupils have responded well to the new behaviour policy that leaders introduced at the start of the current academic year. Disruption to learning has reduced significantly, from levels that were previously too high, because most teachers apply the behaviour policy consistently.

- The proportion of pupils excluded for fixed periods of time, which rose after the new behaviour policy was introduced, has fallen again because pupils are responding to the school's high expectations regarding their conduct.
- Serious incidents of unacceptable behaviour are rare. Pupils who have found it difficult to manage their conduct told inspectors that staff have supported them very well, and that this has had a positive effect on their behaviour and attendance.
- Pupils generally behave well around the academy during social times and are polite and welcoming. Around the site there is very little litter, damage or graffiti.
- Recent changes to the school's behaviour policy have helped ensure that pupils wear the correct uniform, look smart and start lessons with the right equipment.
- Pupils told inspectors that the school's revised mobile phones policy has almost eliminated the inappropriate use of these devices during lessons and at social times.
- Attendance, previously too low, has improved and is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school has been reduced significantly. Pupils typically arrive at school punctually.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Most year groups join the school with attainment that is at least in line with the national average. In 2018 pupils' progress, including that of the most able and those who are disadvantaged, was too low, including in English, mathematics and science. As a result, their attainment at GCSE was not high enough.
- Leaders have acted swiftly to improve the effectiveness of teaching since the start of the current academic year. They have also made changes to ensure that pupils are not studying so many subjects that the teaching time available for each is too limited. Current pupils are making improving but not consistently good progress in each subject. Therefore, outcomes require improvement.
- The progress that current disadvantaged pupils make, though still too variable, is strengthening overall and close to that of other pupils. This is because disadvantaged pupils' behaviour and attendance is better, which is enabling them to benefit more from improvements in the effectiveness of teaching.
- The progress made by the most able pupils is too variable, both between and often within different subjects. This is because these pupils complete work that often does not demand enough of them. The most able make strong progress in some subjects, including art, history and physical education.
- Overall, current pupils are making good progress in a number of subjects, including art, modern foreign languages and physical education. Pupils' progress in English is improving rapidly. Key stage 3 pupils are making particularly strong progress in mathematics.
- In most subjects, pupils with SEND make good progress from their individual starting points, because teachers know pupils' needs well, and make sure that these are met.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision typically follow appropriate courses which enable them to achieve a range of qualifications, including English and mathematics.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Sixth-form students make good progress from their starting points. They achieve particularly well in English literature, history, mathematics and psychology. Students do less well in science. Teachers' strong subject knowledge contributes well to students' learning. Students benefit from teachers' precise guidance about how to meet the demands of examination questions.
- Students attend well in the sixth form. They appreciate the wide range of courses that they can follow, both at their own school and at others that are part of the consortium. Students also benefit from guidance that helps them choose subjects that are a good match for their interests, aspirations and abilities.
- Teachers promote students' engagement in scholarly discussion and debate. Teachers ask challenging questions, which prompt students to remember and consolidate their previous learning, and to think deeply. During the inspection, this helped politics students explain why some believe liberals place too much emphasis on the importance of individual liberty.
- Many students develop their leadership skills through the positions of responsibility that they hold at school. Students run school events, raise money for charity, and help to support younger pupils with their learning.
- Sixth-form students benefit from impartial careers advice, which helps them to make successful applications for apprenticeships, employment or higher education. All students undertake appropriate work experience during Year 12. A high proportion of students go on to pursue undergraduate-level study at some of the most selective universities.
- Students behave well during their lessons, when completing private study and at social times. They are positive role models for younger pupils at the school. Students told inspectors that they value highly the positive and productive relationships that they have with their teachers. They are, and feel, safe and well supported.
- Leadership of the sixth form is strong. Leaders have well-established systems to check that standards of teaching are secure within each of the different consortium schools, and action is taken quickly if things need to improve.
- Leaders make careful checks upon the progress that students are making. They act quickly to provide appropriate and timely support to individuals who are falling behind. Vulnerable students are well provided for.
- Students learn useful and age-appropriate information about how to stay safe and healthy, and manage their finances. This helps to prepare them for the transition to greater independence when they leave school.

School details

Unique reference number	137847
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10085811

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1,087
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	140
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Neil Hounsom
Headteacher	Mrs Merry John
Telephone number	01707 321755
Website	www.stanborough.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@stanborough.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 December 2014

Information about this school

- Stanborough School is a larger than the average-sized secondary school. The sixth form provision is operated through a collaborative arrangement with four other local schools.
- Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also below average.
- The proportion of boys at the school is above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is slightly below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils with SEND.

- A small number of pupils attend offsite provision on a part- or full-time basis, at The Park Education Support Centre, Oaklands College and Forest House Education Centre.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a large number of lessons. Some observations were carried out with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors scrutinised the quality of work in a large number of pupils' books.
- Inspectors had meetings with six groups of pupils and spoke with pupils in classes and during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with members of the local governing body; the headteacher; other leaders and teachers; members of the support staff; and representatives of the local authority.
- Information was considered relating to safeguarding; pupils' attendance and behaviour; progress and achievement; leaders' evaluation of the quality of education; leaders' improvement planning; the curriculum; and the work of external agencies working with the school.
- Inspectors considered the views of 147 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the 81 responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors also considered the 53 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Jason Howard, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
John Constable	Ofsted Inspector
John Craig	Ofsted Inspector
Nicola Hood	Ofsted Inspector
Gerard Batty	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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