

Inspection of Stowmarket High School

Onehouse Road, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1QR

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 January 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils enjoy their time at Stowmarket High School. Most pupils are well behaved. They have a good understanding of diversity and how others are different from themselves. Racist or homophobic language is not tolerated by pupils or staff. When bullying happens, it is quickly addressed and sorted out.

Across the school, however, there are issues with some pupils' behaviour. These pupils play truant from lessons and sometimes disrupt the learning of others. This behaviour does not reflect the positive attitudes of everyone else. This upsets the majority of pupils who want to concentrate on their studies. Leaders are only just getting to grips with the problem.

The curriculum offer for pupils has improved. Pupils study more subjects than they were able to before. For some pupils, however, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), learning can be tricky as not all teachers take into account pupils' different needs.

Pupils experience a range of trips and clubs that make school life interesting. These clubs are accessible to all pupils, regardless of background. Pupils take on a range of responsibilities. 'Anti-bullying ambassadors' and pupils in the 'student union' work with leaders to improve the school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have made positive changes to the school curriculum. Pupils can now all study a language, for example, when they did not before. In addition, leaders increased the length of time pupils study subjects. For instance, pupils now study some subjects, like geography, for three years rather than two. This is helping pupils to understand subjects in more depth.

Curriculum documentation is in place for all subjects. This highlights what knowledge pupils should know and when. It shows clearly how pupils' knowledge builds over time. Many teachers really understand their subjects. They use their good subject knowledge to break learning down so pupils find it easier to understand. They use regular checks to see what pupils know. This supports them to help pupils make progress. However, some curriculum thinking is new. Some teachers have not got to grips with the best way to teach pupils or check what they know. As a result, some pupils do not make as much progress as they should.

Some teachers do not support the needs of pupils with SEND well enough. Some of the needs of pupils with SEND are not identified with sufficient precision. In other cases, when the information is accurate, some teachers do not use the information consistently well enough to help pupils with SEND to make the best possible progress.

Leaders have effective processes that identify and help pupils who struggle with reading. These packages support pupils to catch up with their reading and access the school's curriculum.

Leaders' chosen approach to behaviour is not understood or used consistently well by some staff. In addition, some staff do not feel leaders support them well enough to deal with poor behaviour. While many pupils behave well, a small number do not. Despite a range of thoughtful approaches, like the oasis centre, to support pupils with their emotional needs, some pupils are still absent too often. Persistent absence remains high.

Leaders' approach to personal development is a strength of the school. A high-quality personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum teaches pupils well about a range of topics. The school's 'inspirational futures' approach to careers, for instance, ensures pupils are ready for their next steps.

The headteacher, supported by the trust, has strengthened leadership across the school. Leaders have made inroads into some of the issues, including attendance and support for pupils with SEND. More work is necessary for pupils and parents to see the benefit.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have a good understanding of how to spot if a pupil is at risk of harm or is finding life difficult. They report concerns promptly to safeguarding leaders. The system for reporting concerns is clear and known by staff.

Safeguarding leaders keep detailed safeguarding records. These show prompt and appropriate action in response to worries about pupils. Leaders' own pastoral care systems provide support for pupils who struggle with their mental health.

Pupils have a good understanding in how to keep safe. In addition, safeguarding leaders use a range of other, well-considered, agencies to give pupils and their families the help they need.

Leaders manage allegations against adults well. They work closely with the local authority to do this. Appropriate pre-employment checks on all staff are in place.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some curriculum changes are not firmly embedded in teachers' practice. Teachers do not always choose activities that support learning. Sometimes they have not got to grips with the new curriculum thinking and assessment. As a

result, pupils do not make sufficient progress in some subjects. Leaders should ensure that all subjects are taught consistently well.

- Information about the needs of pupils with SEND is not always precise enough to be helpful to teachers. In addition, some teachers do not always use the information well to support pupils with SEND to progress well. Leaders should ensure all teachers have, and use well, accurate information about the needs of pupils with SEND.
- Too many pupils are persistently absent. They miss too much of their education. Leaders should ensure all pupils attend school regularly.
- Leaders' chosen behaviour approaches are not being used consistently well. As a result, the behaviour of a small number of pupils does not reflect the positive behaviour shown by the rest of the school. Leaders should ensure their behaviour systems and processes are used consistently well by all staff to support pupils with their behaviour.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	145055
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10243455
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	873
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Steven Alderson
Headteacher	Dave Lee-Allan
Website	www.stowhigh.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school no longer has a sixth form.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information about, and engagement with providers of, approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, design technology, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science. For each deep

dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils about learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work.

- Inspectors considered plans and pupils' work in other curriculum areas such as art, physical education and information technology.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust.
- The lead inspector had a telephone call with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including behaviour records, bullying logs and attendance registers.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils over both days of the inspection.
- Inspectors met with different leaders, including the school's special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors consider a range of documentation related to supporting pupils with SEND.
- To inspect safeguarding, the lead inspector met with the school's safeguarding leaders. Inspectors looked closely at safeguarding systems, processes and records. They spoke with pupils, staff and trustees about safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered the 209 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 209 free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the 60 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Damian Loneragan, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Alex Hayes	Ofsted Inspector
Daniel Gee	Ofsted Inspector
Adam Cooke	His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023