

Inspection of a good school: Sandbach School

Crewe Road, Sandbach, Cheshire CW11 3NS

Inspection dates:

27 and 28 June 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, including students in the sixth form, feel happy and safe at Sandbach School. They told inspectors that leaders help them to settle in well. Pupils are confident that staff will quickly resolve any concerns that they may have. Leaders deal with incidents of bullying swiftly.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils at Sandbach School, including for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, in some subjects, the curriculum in key stage 3 does not support pupils to build their knowledge as well as they could. Added to this, some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not achieve as highly as they should by the end of key stage 4.

Leaders have introduced a new behaviour policy to raise staff's expectations of pupils' behaviour. Most pupils behave well in lessons and during social times. For example, the 'family lunch' approach creates a calm and friendly atmosphere while pupils are eating together.

Sixth-form students relish taking on leadership positions within the school. They make valuable contributions to school life, including acting as reading buddies for younger pupils.

There is an abundance of extracurricular activities available to all pupils so that they can become well-rounded 'Sandbachians'. Pupils are proud of their accomplishments in a wide range of sports, including athletics, rugby and cricket. Pupils also appreciate opportunities to play music, take part in arts performances and to join the Combined Cadet Force.

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

Leaders expect pupils to achieve strong academic outcomes. They also aim for pupils to experience a wide range of different subjects before choosing their options in key stage 4. While pupils have access to many subjects in key stage 3, they do not have the opportunity to learn the curriculum in some of these subjects in enough depth. As a result, some pupils are insufficiently prepared for the demands of key stage 4. Added to this, the proportion of pupils choosing to study the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects is low.

In some subjects, leaders have thought carefully about the essential knowledge that they want pupils to learn and when this content should be taught. In these subjects, leaders regularly evaluate the impact of the curriculum and take appropriate action when pupils do not learn as well as they should. However, in other subjects, leaders have not thought deeply enough about the knowledge that pupils should learn. This hinders teachers in designing learning that builds on what pupils know already.

In the main, teachers have strong subject knowledge. They use this to deliver the curriculum effectively, including in the sixth form. In subjects where the curriculum is organised well, teachers use assessment strategies successfully to check whether pupils have secured the knowledge that is important for future learning.

Leaders have prioritised reading. They have put suitable systems in place to identify those pupils who find reading more difficult. Skilled staff provide a range of support to help these pupils to catch up quickly. Leaders encourage reading for pleasure. For example, leaders are securing further resources and books to provide additional opportunities for reading, including for those students in the sixth form.

Leaders are proactive in identifying the additional needs of pupils with SEND. Leaders ensure that teachers are equipped with information that enables them to support these pupils well. Nonetheless, because of the weaknesses in curriculum design, pupils with SEND do not learn as well as they could.

Leaders have acted to improve pupils' rates of attendance. Despite this, some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not attend school as regularly as they should. These pupils have gaps in their learning. They do not achieve as well as their peers.

As a consequence of leaders' new behaviour policy, most pupils concentrate increasingly well in lessons. This helps most pupils to learn without disruption.

Leaders cater well for pupils' wider development. For instance, pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. They learn about other faiths, cultures and the importance of treating people equally. For example, leaders' choice of books for tutor group reading ignites meaningful debate about these topics. Students in the sixth form value the wealth of careers information and guidance that leaders provide to help them to prepare for their next steps.

Staff told inspectors that they welcome leaders' appreciation of their workload and well-being. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture across the school. Staff receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training. Staff know how to identify and report concerns about a pupil's welfare. Leaders have a clear understanding of potential current and local safeguarding risks for pupils.

Leaders are quick to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the help that they need. For example, leaders have built effective relationships with a number of local external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive timely and appropriate support.

Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum. Guest speakers supplement this learning when necessary. Pupils are also taught how to keep safe in the local community and when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects in key stage 3, pupils do not learn the curriculum in sufficient depth. This means that some pupils are not as well prepared for key stage 4 as they could be. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is designed well across key stage 3. This is so that pupils can learn curriculum content in sufficient depth in readiness for the next stage of their education.
- In some subjects, leaders have not thought carefully enough about the knowledge that pupils should learn. This hinders teachers in designing learning that builds on what pupils already know. Leaders should ensure that, in these subjects, they identify the knowledge that pupils need in readiness for subsequent learning.
- Some pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, do not attend school as often as they should. These pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders should embed their strategies to improve the rates of attendance of these pupils.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2014.

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	137491
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10291430
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1509
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Peter Sherratt
Headteacher	Sarah Burns
Website	sandbachschool.org
Date of previous inspection	10 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Leaders use one registered alternative provider and one unregistered alternative provider for a very small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection that 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 completed deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history, geography and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with

pupils and students about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' and students' work.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, leaders and other staff.
- The lead inspector met with some governors, including the chair of the governing body. She also met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils and students from Years 7 to 12 about their experiences of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' and students' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including leaders' improvement plans.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the staff responsible for safeguarding and scrutinised the single central record. Inspectors considered leaders' safeguarding processes and procedures. Inspectors discussed matters relating to safeguarding with pupils, students and staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils and students for this to be considered.

Inspection team

Eleanor Overland, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Joe Barker

Ofsted Inspector

Paula Crawley

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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