

## INSPECTION REPORT

**Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College**

Sandbach

LEA: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111406

Headteacher: Mr J M Leigh

Reporting inspector: Mr J W Ashton  
4492

Dates of inspection: 6 – 9 March 2000

Inspection number: 185771

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Female
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Astins
Date of previous inspection:	2 November 1995

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College is an all girls, 11 to 18, comprehensive school in a small market town in South East Cheshire. There are 1138 pupils on roll, including 180 students in the sixth form. It is consistently over subscribed in the main school. With fewer than 5 per cent of its pupils eligible for free school meals, its intake is socially more advantaged than disadvantaged. Although the school draws pupils from a wide ability range the bias is towards middle and higher attainers; above average proportions have already reached the expected National Curriculum levels 4 and 5 when they enter the school. There is only one pupil on roll for whom English is an additional language. Eighty two pupils are on the school's register for special educational needs, fourteen at the higher stages 3 to 5 of the special needs code of practice (*moderate and specific learning difficulties in the main*). The staying on rate into the sixth form is high, and most sixth form students go on to higher education.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

The school remains a high achieving and successful one (*it was described as such in its last report*). Standards are very high, teaching and learning are very good and leadership is very effective. The school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- It sustains very high standards of attainment throughout the school.
- Most aspects of the quality of teaching are very good, leading to very effective learning in most lessons.
- Attendance is well above average, leading to very good continuity of learning.
- Very positive pupil attitudes, mature and helpful relationships, very good behaviour and mutual respect create the atmosphere in which morale is high and pupils really want to learn.
- Staff successfully use the pastoral systems to provide tailor made support for pupils.
- Sixth form provision is an increasing strength of the school.
- Leadership is very effective. The resulting clear vision and direction, genuine consultation, welcoming atmosphere, warmth and openness, leads to trust and to very good teamwork in almost all areas.
- Provision for pupils' special educational needs, including for those who are gifted and talented, is very good.

#### **What could be improved**

- Pupils could be encouraged to be more active learners and be given more control of their own learning in some subjects.
- Not all pupils receive their full information technology (ICT) entitlement at Key Stage 4 and the use of ICT across the curriculum needs managing and co-ordinating.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.*

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has improved in a number of significant ways since the previous inspection. School priorities are costed and expressed clearly in longer term planning than used to be the case. The library has developed into a very useful resource centre, helped enormously by the appointment of a well qualified and very effective full time librarian. Provision for religious education has improved at Key Stage 4, but is not being offered in the sixth form. The headteacher and other senior staff monitor teachers' work thoroughly and systematically. The school continues to implement strategies designed to widen the range of courses offered in the sixth form, and to improve further the already above average standards at GCE Advanced Level. Access to and effective use of information technology (ICT) is much improved at Key Stage 3 (*Years 7 to 9*) but there is room for improvement in its use and co-ordination across the curriculum at Key Stage 4 (*Years 10 and 11*). One issue mentioned in the last report remains as it was - collective worship is not provided on a daily basis – and other matters were not the focus of this short inspection.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (at age 16) has been consistently well above the national average for at least the last six years. Pupils' average GCSE points score in 1999 was 52 points against a national average of 38 points. Well above average proportions of pupils achieved at least five A\* to C grades (*77 per cent against a national figure of 46 per cent*). Attainment is also well above average when measured against similar schools (*those whose pupils have similar social circumstances – based largely upon the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals*).

A particularly high proportion (*27 per cent*) of pupils achieved either A\* or A GCSE grades in 1999, the highest proportion for six years. These high grades were achieved in every subject taken to GCSE level, but especially in history, where 26 per cent of an entry of just over 100 pupils achieved an A\* grade. This is an outstanding result.

Most students leaving the sixth form in 1999 left with at least two GCE A-levels and between them students achieved an average of 19.9 points (*against a national average of 17.9 points*). GNVQ courses were relatively new in the school at the time of the last inspection. The school offers advanced level and intermediate courses in both business studies and health and social care and is seeking to extend the range to include courses in leisure and tourism from September 2000. Although student numbers on these courses remain relatively low (*group sizes from 4 to 7 in 1999*), success rates are high. For example, six of the seven students taking Advanced level Business Studies achieved at least a merit in 1999 and three of the six students entered for Advanced level health and social care did so.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are generally enthusiastic about their lessons. They come to lessons with very positive attitudes and a willingness to learn, and show a high capacity for sustained concentration.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Behaviour around the school, in lessons, in the school grounds and in assemblies, is very mature.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are very warm and create an atmosphere of harmony and calm in which pupils can flourish.
Attendance	Well above the national average. Punctuality is also very good.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very good	Good

*Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.*

The quality of teaching was consistently good and much of it very good throughout the school. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection. Seventy five per cent of the 71 lessons were at least good. Thirty one per cent were very good or better. Twenty five per cent were satisfactory. Three per cent (*two lessons, one each in mathematics and English*) were judged outstanding.

Teachers are providing their pupils with most of the key skills they need to learn effectively (*the key areas for further development are the use of ICT and the opportunities for more active and independent work*). They are building up pupils' self confidence, particularly on the run up to national tests and examinations. This is an area of particular skill amongst the teachers. The quality of pupils' written work is very good, which is very helpful when it comes to revision time. Teachers have a reassuring, encouraging demeanour, a warmth about them that helps to foster mature relationships, ones that are totally underpinned by whole school systems which preserve the school's focus as an effective learning establishment.

Some teachers are better than others at making effective use of ICT in their teaching and also in developing their pupils' abilities to actively plan and carry out some of their own learning.

Teaching in the lessons seen in English was very good, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In mathematics only one lesson of the seven observed was less than good, and very good lessons were seen at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Science lessons were evenly split between good and satisfactory.



## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is broad and balanced with an increasingly good mixture of traditional and vocational courses in the sixth form.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. The school is equally good at supporting pupils who need additional support and stretching those at the higher end of the academic spectrum.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils are well supported.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good provision overall. Collective worship occurs only twice weekly and these are sometimes spiritual occasions. There is additional spirituality in English, drama and art lessons. A very strong moral code is a significant feature of the school. Team work and opportunities for civilised social interaction are numerous. Cultural awareness is strongly reinforced through assemblies, visits abroad, and in curriculum work in religious education, music, art, English, textiles and modern languages lessons.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good care is provided for all pupils. This allows pupils to flourish and to grow in self-esteem. There are very good procedures to ensure both health and safety and child protection.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher leads in an open and very consultative way. His knowledge of school standards is accurate and up-to-date, based upon regular first hand and systematic classroom observation. Large and effective senior management team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. The governing body is well informed and contains a good mixture of experience and expertise which complements well the knowledge and skills of the senior management team.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Detailed and helpful analyses of trends in pupil achievement going back many years, pin point relative strengths and weaknesses and inform future planning.
The strategic use of resources	Very good except for some uneconomic deployment of staff in the sixth form.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like the school.</li> <li>• They believe them to be making good progress.</li> <li>• Behaviour in school is good.</li> <li>• The teaching is good.</li> <li>• They feel comfortable approaching the school.</li> <li>• The school expects their children to work hard.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> <li>• It is helping their children to mature.</li> <li>• It provides an interesting range of activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They have some concerns over the total quantity of homework and the unevenness of the amounts set from night to night.</li> <li>• They would like more regular information on their daughters' progress.</li> <li>• Some parents and carers think that their children in Years 7 to 11 should be allowed (<i>as students in the sixth form already are</i>) to wear smart trousers to school, particularly during the winter months.</li> <li>• They think that there could be more and stronger links with the boys' school, to the mutual benefit of both schools.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agreed with parents' and carers' positive comments, but they also judged the quantity and quality of homework to be appropriate, in the main. They found that the school organises more occasions than most for reporting back on pupils' progress (*at least one communication per term*). More sharing of expertise at the sixth form level could undoubtedly benefit both schools.

## PART B: COMMENTARY

### WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

#### It sustains very high standards of attainment throughout the school.

- 1 Well above average proportions of pupils enter the school (*at age 11*) with the expected National Curriculum levels 4 and 5 in both English and mathematics. Above average proportions of pupils have the expected levels in science when they arrive in Year 7.
- 2 These high standards are maintained and extended by the end of Key Stage 3 (*at age 14*) when well above average proportions of pupils achieve levels 5 to 7 in the national tests in all three core subjects English, mathematics and science (*with a few reaching the exceptionally high level 8 in English and mathematics*). Attainment is also well above average when measured against similar schools (*those whose pupils have similar social circumstances*). The trend in the school's average national test scores over the last four years has been an increase from year to year, broadly in line with the national trend, consistently three to four points higher. This is equivalent to the pupils being, on average, three to four terms ahead of pupils generally.
- 3 Very good teaching, very positive pupils' attitudes, well above average attendance, and the pupils' capacity for sustained hard work, are all significant factors in this well above average achievement throughout this and the other key stages.
- 4 When pupils reach the end of Key Stage 4 (at age 16) they achieve well above average GCSE points scores overall (*52 points against a national average of 38 points*), and well above average proportions achieve at least five A\* to C grades (*77 per cent against a national figure of 46 per cent*). The high proportion (27%) of pupils achieving either A\* or A grades was particularly noticeable in 1999, the highest proportion for six years. These grades were achieved in every subject taken to GCSE level, but especially in history, where 26% of an entry of just over 100 pupils achieved the highest possible grade.
- 5 Most students leaving the sixth form in 1999 left with at least two GCE A-levels and between them students achieved an average score of 19.9 points (*against a national average of 17.9 points*). These well above average results were achieved despite the fact that some pupils transferred to colleges elsewhere at the end of their Key Stage 4 courses, sometimes because they wished to take a subject not offered at Sandbach High School.
- 6 Of the subjects with a relatively large entry at A-level, those in which students achieved the highest proportion of grades A and B in 1999 were art and design, business studies, English Literature, French, mathematics and psychology. Subjects with a smaller total entry, but a large proportion achieving the highest grades were design and technology (*three of the four candidates achieved either grade A or B*), music (*two of the three candidates*), physical education (*four of the five*), physics (*two of the three*), Spanish (*all four*) and textiles (*four of the six candidates*).

- 7 Fewer students than at the time of the previous inspection fail to achieve a pass grade at A-level. There are, however, some exceptions, the most notable of which were in biology. All students entered for biology in 1997 achieved at least grade E, and 40 per cent of them attained at least grade B. But over one half of those entered for biology in 1998, and one quarter of the 1999 entry, failed to achieve grade E. One reason for this trend is a mistaken student perception that biology is the easiest of the three science subjects.
- 8 GNVQ courses were relatively new in the school at the time of the last inspection. The school offers advanced and intermediate courses in both business studies and health and social care and is seeking to extend this range to include courses in leisure and tourism from September 2000. Although numbers remain relatively low (*group sizes from 4 to 7 in 1999*), success rates are high. For example, six of the seven students taking Advanced level business studies achieved at least a merit, and three of the six students entered for Advanced level health and social care did so.
- 9 Literacy levels are very high in the school – a love of language and its use permeates the work of the whole school. A good example of this was the excellent use of a visiting poet to stimulate and consolidate a love of poetry in pupils from Year 7. He began the day by enthusing the whole of the Lower School in assembly and the remainder of his time with Year 7 classes in turn, reading from and discussing the background to some of his published works.

**Most aspects of the quality of teaching are very good, leading to very effective learning in most classes.**

- 10 The quality of the teaching was consistently good and much of it very good throughout the school. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection. 75 per cent of the 71 lessons seen were at least good. 31 per cent were very good or better. 25 per cent were satisfactory. Three per cent (*two lessons, one each in mathematics and English*) were judged outstanding.
- 11 Teachers are providing their pupils with most of the key skills they need to learn effectively. (*The key areas for further development are the use of ICT and the creation of further opportunities for more active and independent work*). They are building up pupils' self-confidence, particularly on the run up to national tests and examinations. This is an area of particular skill amongst the teachers. The quality of pupils' written work is very good, which is very helpful when it comes to revision time. Teachers have a reassuring, encouraging demeanour. There is a warmth about them that helps to foster mature relationships. These are totally underpinned by whole school systems which preserve the school's focus as an effective learning establishment.
- 12 Teaching in the lessons seen in English was very good, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In mathematics, only one lesson of the seven observed was less than good, and very good lessons were seen at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Science lessons were evenly split between good and satisfactory.

- 13 The most notable features of some of the better lessons seen during the inspection were the teachers' secure command of their subjects and the lively way they presented interesting material. Added to this were huge amounts of teacher enthusiasm, high expectations of what their pupils could achieve, a very challenging pace, a wide range of appropriate teaching strategies and very skilled questioning. The larger proportions of these lessons, and the resulting more effective learning (*remembering that very few lessons were observed in some subjects in this short inspection*), were in English, mathematics, modern languages, music and physical education.
- 14 Year 13 students in an English class were developing sharp analytical skills, as they prepared for their 'unseen' prose analysis, through the teacher's well chosen device of making them explain to each other the pros and cons of which of five short stories should win the Booker Prize.
- 15 A sparkling mathematics lesson with higher attaining pupils in Year 10 was notable for its rapid pace, the teacher's high expectations (*implicit in her demeanour*), her infectious enthusiasm for the subject, and the high degree of clarity of exposition. It was also memorable for the pupils' studious approach, sustained concentration and effort (*they only sought the teacher's aid after commendable perseverance*) and an excellent attitude and mature approach that would do credit to a well-motivated sixth form class.
- 16 A modern language teacher's enthusiasm for Spanish, and her carefully structured incremental approach, ensured that by the end of a 50 minute period a Year 7 class could all tell the time in Spanish, including the use of quarter hours.
- 17 A Year 9 French class benefited from the teacher's constant use of the target language, but also from her animated use of a suitcase full of clothes as a way of fostering vocabulary.
- 18 Year 7 music classes are being very well taught in a lively and interesting way, one that engages all the pupils at the start of the lesson and keeps it that way until the very end.
- 19 Pupils in a Year 11 dance lesson found their teacher involving them in a broad range of appropriate activities, using a whole variety of effective teaching strategies. Their quality of movement and their ability to develop a sequence built well on their previous learning. The teacher's thorough understanding of her subject and of her pupils was clear from the discussions of how such sequences should be evaluated. The subsequent paired work was at a better level, and demonstrated pupils' increased ability to plan their own and to evaluate each other's work, as a result of this discussion.
- 20 Some teachers are better than others at making effective use of ICT in their teaching and also in developing their pupils' abilities to actively plan and carry out some of their own learning. Good examples of the former were seen in design and technology and of the latter in English and psychology.

**Attendance is well above average, leading to very good continuity of learning.**

- 21 Attendance at the school is very good. For the past three years the attendance rate has been around 94 per cent, which is well above both the national average for all schools and the average for girls' schools. It is well in line with the good attendance figures noted in the last inspection report. This current school year the school's weekly attendance figures so far, with few exceptions, are comfortably above 92 per cent. Unauthorised absence is very low. Punctuality is good. Pupils arrive on time and lessons begin promptly.
- 22 These high levels of attendance ensure uninterrupted learning for most pupils, which contributes to their high achievement. They also enable the school to organise its science curriculum in a way which might not be successful if pupils' attendance was more intermittent.

**Very positive pupil attitudes, mature and helpful relationships, excellent behaviour and mutual respect create the atmosphere in which morale is high and pupils really want to learn.**

- 23 Pupils in the main school and students in the sixth form are very well behaved and have very positive attitudes to their work. The result is that teachers have to spend minimal time on ensuring order and are able to organise pupils quickly on task. Behaviour around the school, in lessons, in the school grounds and in assemblies is very mature. There have been no permanent exclusions (*and only one temporary one*) so far this year. Pupils have a very strong sense of loyalty towards the school, and there is a noticeable absence of litter.
- 24 Pupils show sustained concentration. They come to lessons with very positive attitudes and a willingness to learn. They ask as well as answer questions readily, join in discussions and contribute well during lessons. Most pupils are confident, good-humoured and relaxed.
- 25 Pupils are generally enthusiastic about their lessons and full of praise for their helpful and understanding teachers. Respect for pastoral co-ordinators comes over clearly in the interviews inspectors conducted with pupils. (*For example, Year 8 pupils felt that they could tell their co-ordinator anything in confidence and always receive help and support*). Students in the sixth form were also very concerned that inspectors should have a highly positive picture of their school. Reasons for this included the very supportive teachers, but also the systems for consulting students, even for involving them as observers of the regular proceedings of the Governing Body. Examples of successes of the School Council are the introduction of the breakfast club and of large shared lockers, in which coats can hang vertically.
- 26 Pupils' understanding of the effects of their actions on others is clearly demonstrated. They socialise well outside the classroom and the atmosphere is good-humoured and calm even in the crowded dining room. When the visiting poet was late for the lower school assembly during the inspection week, and 600 pupils were aware that the headteacher and members of staff were having to improvise by reading his poems until he arrived, the air of mutual understanding and collective support in the hall was tangible.

- 27 Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are very warm, creating an atmosphere of harmony and calm in which pupils can flourish. Pupils are valued both as individuals and for their contribution to the daily life of school. They respect each other's feelings and are supportive of each other in lessons. Pupils are very polite and friendly, and welcome visitors into their school. Sixth form students are deliberately not expected to be prefects. They are good role models, supportive of the younger pupils, not in charge of them. The prefects are drawn instead from Year 11.

**Staff successfully use the pastoral systems to provide tailor made support for pupils.**

- 28 Very good care is provided for all pupils. Pastoral staff know the pupils as individuals and make good use of the systematic records they keep on each pupil, when offering her support and guidance. They are sensitive to pupils' particular needs and use their comprehensive knowledge well when, for instance, deciding on the movement of pupils between teaching groups after the termly cluster meetings involving both academic and pastoral staff.
- 29 There are very good procedures to ensure child protection, with trained staff, sensitivity to individual pupils, suitable liaison with outside agencies and appropriate confidentiality at all times. The well-structured sex education policy formulated by staff, pupils, parents, governors and a health worker, is clearly and firmly set within a moral framework.
- 30 There is a named person responsible for health and safety procedures. Regular departmental and whole-school risk assessments take place with appropriate recording and reporting to governors.

**Sixth form provision is an increasing strength of the school.**

- 31 The separate purpose-built sixth form centre, which the students persuaded governors to call a sixth form college, was financed three years ago by a seven year loan from the Local Education Authority. Students were consulted in its design and suggested some modifications which were acted upon. The centre provides an excellent teaching base, but also numerous areas where students may work without distraction from the lower school pupils or from social distractions in the sixth form common room. This common room has been deliberately kept in the main school building to preserve links with the rest of the school.
- 32 The school's philosophy of not requiring sixth form students to carry out prefectorial duties but to act as role models for younger pupils, has resulted in a more relaxed and more pleasant relationship between older and younger pupils than might otherwise have been the case. Access to the sixth form is not dependent upon an academic hurdle of GCSE grades, but does involve careful counselling and advice to ensure that the prospective student is right to come into this sixth form, and is choosing the most appropriate courses for her.
- 33 The range of vocational courses is increasing. In addition to the relatively wide range of Advanced and Advanced Supplementary courses on offer, a small number are provided jointly with the neighbouring boys' school.

**Leadership is very effective. The resulting clear vision and direction, genuine consultation, welcoming atmosphere, warmth and openness leads to trust and to very good teamwork in almost all areas.**

- 34 The headteacher, now in his seventh year as head, following a three year period as deputy head at the school, leads in a very open and consultative way. His knowledge of standards is accurate and up-to-date, based upon regular, systematic and first hand classroom observation. He keeps all who attend and work in the school, his governors and his parental body, well informed, and consults widely before making any major changes in its direction. He has their full support and is very successful, particularly in his major role of maintaining the high standards and continuing success of the school. Perceived weaknesses in particular subject areas have been identified and are being systematically solved. His open and friendly style is backed by a determination to tackle any issue which detracts from the school's main aim of "developing in each individual student the highest standards of learning, so that they can acquire the skills and confidence that will serve them throughout their lives."
- 35 He is well supported in this task, and in the day-to-day organisation of the school, by a large and effective senior management team, whose joint expertise and skills add up to a considerable force for good in the school. There is no inner executive of headteacher and deputy head. Assistant heads and senior teachers carry out many of the tasks previously tackled by deputy heads when the school had more than one of these. An individual member of the team also carries out a role which is relatively new in the school: the very successful curriculum support role, whereby whole departments and individual heads of department (*especially those new to the role*) are given intensive support and mentoring to make them even more effective.
- 36 The governing body contains a good mixture of experience and expertise which complements well the knowledge and skills of the senior management team. Kept very well informed by a headteacher, who believes in openness and wide-ranging consultation, they play a full part in school decision making. For example, when results in a curriculum area were falling behind those of comparable areas, they were thoroughly involved in deciding which measures to implement to bring about the necessary improvements.
- 37 Pastoral leadership is very good throughout the school, overseen and supported very effectively by three members of the senior management team.
- 38 Co-ordination of the provision for pupils with special educational needs, including for the most able (*and gifted pupils*) is very effective.
- 39 Subject leadership is effective in most subjects, exceptionally so in English and mathematics. There have been recent improvements in the science area, as a result of carefully planned senior management intervention, including a more effective arrangement for rotating science teaching expertise at Key Stage 4, and the recruitment of a second in department whose brief includes the co-ordination of Key Stage 3 science. ICT lacks co-ordination across the curriculum at Key Stage 4; too many pupils leave the school with gaps in their ICT experience.



**Provision for special educational needs, including that for the gifted and talented, is very good.**

- 40 There is very good provision for the identification, assessment and monitoring of the progress of pupils with special educational needs (SEN).
- 41 The main aim of the special needs department is to improve the self-esteem of pupils. The combination of strategic oversight from a member of the senior management team plus the sterling work of the teachers responsible for the day-to-day work of the SEN department, works very effectively at the whole school level. The senior manager co-ordinates the involvement of outside agencies, legal requirements and the professional development of staff. The teachers deal with the assessment of pupils and liaison with subject departments to develop suitable teaching and learning materials.
- 42 Good liaison with partner primary schools has led to helpful records from the primary schools, giving necessary information that the secondary school can build on to help the pupils further.
- 43 The two parallel half-hour sessions before school each morning for pupils with SEN are well taught by two teachers, each with effective support from classroom assistants plus a large volunteer force of sixth form students. `Drop-in` sessions are held every lunchtime for all those who need help and support, whether or not they are on the SEN register.
- 44 In their present form SEN records are clear, well maintained and exemplary in detail and are in the process of being computerised. Individual education plans (IEPs) are of good quality, detailed, and include all the information required by the special needs Code of Practice. Subject related IEPs have clear targets and strategies of how pupils are to achieve them. The SEN register is well managed. It is evident that pupils are moved up and down the ability groupings, and on and off the register, according to progress which is monitored against IEP targets. Every pupil on the SEN register in Year 7, and all those with statements, has an individual staff mentor.
- 45 The school has well-documented examples of pupils who were on its register of SEN but who then went on to achieve more than might be expected later in the school. For example, the pupil who achieved nine GCSE grades and is now studying at GNVQ A-level.
- 46 The school has a very good record and similar success with its range of provision for `gifted` pupils. Involvement in public speaking competitions is one element which has helped to consolidate pupils` higher order speaking skills, resulting in A\* grades in GCSE Spoken English. Two of the three A-level art students who took part in the trip to Tuscany in 1999 gained A grades in art at A-level. Courses at Cheshire`s popular and well used Menai Study Centre, in science, technology, geography, drama and music are well supported by able pupils from the school, resulting in many of them improving their skills and also their examination grades. Gifted pupils in physical education receive county coaching or, in the case of tennis, lessons from a professional coach. There are entries to national mathematics competitions for years 7 to 11, maths master classes for Year 9 and a poetry conference for pupils in years 10 and 11. The progress of the most able pupils is tracked from their entry point in Year 7 through their Year 9 tests and on past their GCSE examinations. The result is that the likelihood of every pupil so identified achieving her potential is greatly increased.

## WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

### **Pupils could be encouraged to be more active learners and be given more control of their own learning in some subjects.**

- 47 The attitudes of pupils at Sandbach High School are very positive. They come to school to learn. Pointed in the right direction, encouraged to be more active in their lessons, trusted to organise more of their own learning and given the right amount of support and stimulation, they `fly`.
- 48 There is a continuum of styles of teaching and learning in the school, ranging from completely teacher controlled through to lessons where pupils are allowed a great deal of autonomy and room to exercise their individual initiative. Different subject areas are at different points on this continuum, not always to the best advantage of the pupils.
- 49 Some teachers in some departments control the learning in their classrooms, laboratories or workshops so carefully they could be said to be `spoon-feeding` the pupils in case they make too much mess, or fail to have a neat enough set of notes for revision. They keep the pupils on a very `tight rein` lest they run in the wrong direction.
- 50 Many pupils, and some adults, prefer this style of teaching. It leads to relatively passive learning and requires less effort than methods which require pupils to be pro-active. Sixth form students told an inspector they were grateful for the `spoon-feeding` (*they introduced the term*) they had received lower down the school. It helped them, they argued, to achieve high grades in their GCSE examinations. Teachers interviewed expressed the opinion that they would always be loath to stop the detailed and very structured revision exercises they always organised on the run ups to the national tests and examinations. Other teachers spoke of wanting to `loosen up` the tight control they held over pupils` written work, of wanting to encourage more independence, to allow more pupil initiative in how, for example, they make notes in their books.
- 51 Science teachers are amongst those trying to encourage more pupil independence but are not clear how to achieve this without damaging the effectiveness of the traditional teaching and learning approach. For example, a science teacher in Year 10 encouraged pupils to write two sentences in their own words, after a short piece of experimental work, but took so long about it, the exercise became counter-productive. Sixth form science teachers in biology and physics are experimenting with how to improve the system of giving notes to their students, but, as they stand, some of their strategies are still leaving students more passive than the teachers intend them to be.
- 52 This is in contrast to the position in psychology where individual students in a Year 13 class had responsibility devolved to them for preparing short summary notes plus a telling example on each of a series of various research methods (*case studies, age-related studies, etcetera*). The resulting feedback session held the attention of the other students much more effectively than if they had been taking notes from the teacher directly, and ought to be more effective in cementing their understanding of a potentially tedious topic.

- 53 A contrast again with groups of pupils in English lessons, sharing tasks and later their conclusions, encouraged to speak about their perception of what is happening in a poem or the chapter of a text, often making their own notes as a matter of routine. No one is passive for long. All are thoroughly involved, all expected to make a contribution. "What do you think?" is a common question.
- 54 Some design and technology staff 'spoon-feed' pupils by giving them too much help, too quickly, in the 'making' elements. Examples of this were found in a Year 10 resistant material lesson and in a Year 11 textiles lesson, thereby discouraging pupils from struggling to think out solutions for themselves.

**Not all pupils receive their full information technology (ICT) entitlement at Key Stage 4 and the use of ICT across the curriculum needs managing and co-ordinating.**

- 55 The situation at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall, but not all pupils receive their full ICT entitlement at Key Stage 4. ICT is not used as well as it might be in some curriculum areas. The contribution of each subject area to pupils' overall ICT experience is not audited, nor are overall records kept of individual pupils' progress in ICT, except within the separate subject areas. Consequently too many pupils fall through the net and leave the school with gaps in their ICT experience.
- 56 There have been improvements at Key Stage 3 since the last report. There is now a well-structured programme that tries to ensure that all pupils experience all aspects of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for ICT. Separate ICT lessons within design and technology guarantee that the work is monitored and assessed by teachers experienced in ICT. The provision is extended in English, mathematics, science and geography to some extent, and assessment of this work is co-ordinated by the Key Stage 3 co-ordinator. Aspects of 'control' are covered in DT, spreadsheets in mathematics, data logging in science and weather graphs in geography. There is an increasing confidence amongst some teachers across the curriculum to make use of ICT in their lessons.
- 57 However, at Key Stage 4 there is no co-ordination across the curriculum. Other than for pupils taking the recently introduced and successful 'Systems and Control' GCSE course, there is no work on computer 'control', and pupils have no guaranteed access to other aspects of ICT, such as data base work and spreadsheets. Most pupils do some word processing but little else. The school is aware of the need for developments in this area. Most teaching staff are very keen to extend their own ICT capabilities, with at least half of the staff having attended either in-house or external training courses during the past 12 months. All staff will receive further ICT training over the next 18 months on the Open University's Learning Schools' programme.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

### It should:

- \* Encourage more active and, where possible, more independent learning throughout the school by:
  - sharing the expertise already existing within the school;
  - organising in-service training for teachers to widen their knowledge and understanding of effective ways of organising so that pupils learn in a more active and independent way.
  
- \* Ensure that all pupils at Key Stage 4 receive their full ICT entitlement by:
  - ensuring that ICT provision at Key Stage 4 is co-ordinated across subject areas so that every pupil has a guaranteed access to every strand before she reaches the end of the key stage;
  - developing ways of logging each individual pupils` progress across the various ICT strands as they are covered in each separate subject.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of lessons observed	71
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	21

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3%	28%	44%	25%	0%	0%	0%

*The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.*

### *Information about the school's pupils*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	950	188
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	54	N/A

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	82	0

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

### *Attendance*

#### **Authorised absence**

	%
School data	5.4
National comparative data	7.9

#### **Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

*Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.*

**Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3**

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	0	197	197

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	174	164	149
	Total	174	164	149
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (98.5)	83 (85)	76 (75)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (45)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	57 (82.5)	62 (63)	45 (56)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	162	173	174
	Total	162	173	174
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (83)	88 (85)	88 (87)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	61(54)	56 (55)	58 (62)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

*Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.*

**Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4**

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	N/a	173	173

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	133	167	168
	Total	133	167	168
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	77 (67.8)	97 (97.7)	97 (99.4)
	National	46.3 (44)	90.7 (90)	95.7 (95)

*Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.*

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	52
	National	37.8

*Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.*

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	N/a
	National	N/a

**Attainment at the end of the sixth form**

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	N/a	67	67

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	N/a	19.9	19.9 ()	N/a	4	4 ()
National	17.7	18.1()	17.9 ()	2.7	2.8()	2.8()

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	N/a
	National	82.5

**Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	2
Indian	
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	1
White	
Any other minority ethnic group	

**Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	13	1
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.



### *Teachers and classes*

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	65
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	199

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	25.4
Key Stage 4	22.8

### *Financial information*

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	2 615,240
Total expenditure	2 599,294
Expenditure per pupil	2,329
Balance brought forward from previous year	54
Balance carried forward to next year	16,000

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1138
Number of questionnaires returned	285

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	57	6	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	51	46	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	55	1	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	58	15	3	1
The teaching is good.	34	61	1	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	55	15	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	48	5	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62	35	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	26	48	15	3	7
The school is well led and managed.	34	54	4	1	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	50	3	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	45	2	0	5

### Other issues raised by parents

Girls should be allowed (*as students in the sixth form already are*) to wear smart trousers to school, particularly during the winter months.

There could be more and stronger links with the boys' school, to the mutual benefit of both schools.