



Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111406
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 278683
Inspection dates 9 November 2005 to 10 November 2005
Reporting inspector Ms Susan Wareing HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Middlewich Road
School category	Community		Sandbach
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Cheshire CW11 3NT
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01270 765031
Number on roll	1256	Fax number	01270 768544
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs J Astins
Date of previous inspection	6 March 2000	Headteacher	Mr J Leigh

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a girls 11 to 18 comprehensive school with specialist Sports College status. It is also a Training School and a Leading Edge Partnership lead school. Both the main school and sixth form are larger than average. Very few pupils are eligible for free school meals or from minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is also low. The intake has more middle and higher attainers than average.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school judges its overall effectiveness to be good, but the inspectors judge it to be outstanding. Pupils enjoy coming to school, feel safe and are active and enthusiastic participants in the outstanding range of opportunities and experiences which the school offers them both in and beyond the classroom. The school goes to great lengths to meet the needs of all its pupils, recently extending its range of vocational courses to reflect more closely the interests and capabilities of all learners. Standards are significantly above average and the school promotes high achievement for all. Behaviour is generally good. The quality of care, support and guidance for pupils is an outstanding feature of the school and contributes much to their impressive personal development. They particularly appreciate the continuity of pastoral care and the dedicated reception area for pupils. They have very positive attitudes to their learning and are confident and articulate young women. The headteacher, senior and middle leaders support a culture which values and nurtures the professional expertise of the staff whom they manage. This builds from within the school the capacity for and commitment to continuous improvement. This has enabled considerable improvements since the last inspection. Planning, monitoring and review are rigorous and systematic. Future improvement activities could gain still more from the development of even sharper success criteria focused on pupils' learning.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school judges the efficiency and effectiveness of the sixth form to be good. Inspectors judge it to be outstanding. The sixth form is extremely well managed and organised. Its approach is determinedly inclusive. Its open entry policy offers all students the opportunity to follow an appropriate programme of study based on their own academic background and personal interests rather than enforcing strict entry criteria. Expectations of the students are high and they work very hard. Most achieve above average standards, and progress well, with a high proportion of students moving on to higher education. The support and guidance they receive builds their confidence and students' behaviour is outstanding. Facilities for students are very good and there are extensive opportunities for work experience and contributions to the community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that, in all monitoring, success criteria are even more sharply focused on precisely what pupils and students are expected to achieve.
- Make further improvements to information and communications technology (ICT) provision so that it reaches the high quality offered in other curriculum areas.
- Develop further opportunities to study vocational subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school considers achievement and standards as good, but inspection judgements are that they are outstanding. From above average levels of attainment on entry, pupils achieve standards which are significantly above average. The school analyses trends in performance very effectively and takes quick action to address any slight variation in standards as they occur. For example, individual teachers as well as departments and pupils are set very precise target grades and actual performance is systematically measured against them. Despite some variation across the school, most pupils and students make good progress and no groups or individuals achieve significantly differently from their peers.

In the sixth form, standards are outstanding and students make good progress. Entry to the sixth form is very inclusive and is not restricted to those students with high academic potential. Students have a wider choice of courses than at the time of the last inspection and are given the opportunity to follow an appropriate course of study based on their own academic background and personal interests. This equips a high proportion of students to gain university places or enter appropriate employment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The school modestly judges this area to be good, but the inspection team judge that it is outstanding. Pupils and students very much enjoy their education at this school. They said so on many occasions during the inspection. Their attendance is slightly higher than the national average and their punctuality is good. Classroom observations demonstrate that pupils' attitudes and behaviour are mostly good and in some cases excellent, as shown in the way they move around the school and were observed to enter the hall for a Remembrance Day assembly.

Pupils feel very secure in the school. They take very seriously the responsibilities offered by membership of the school council. For example, they helped to promote healthy eating by achieving the removal of the fizzy drinks machine from the dining hall. In the sixth form, most students demonstrate outstanding concentration and effort in their attitudes to work and their relationships with teaching and support staff are excellent. Sixth form students have their own council meetings and display great care and responsibility through their many fundraising activities, as part of their excellent contribution to the community.

The provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school is good and excellent use is made of the local and wider environment to promote multicultural issues and to prepare pupils and students thoroughly for their future economic well-being. There is an exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs which are very well used by pupils. These lead to outstanding access to sport and provide a significant contribution to the personal development and well-being of pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that teaching and learning are good overall in all key stages. Most lessons observed were good, and a few were outstanding. No lessons were unsatisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers use their very good subject knowledge and detailed lesson planning to exploit pupils' natural curiosity and drive the pace of learning. In most lessons, pupils progress well as teaching is challenging, activities are varied and materials carefully prepared to match pupils' needs and support learning. Very good relationships are actively fostered through pair and group work. Independent learning skills have improved as teachers are now using a wider range of teaching approaches and pupils are more aware of how they can actively participate in their own learning. ICT is not yet used to maximum effect to support learning. On a few occasions where learning is less good, classroom routines are less well established and pupils' concentration lapses. As a rule, however, they concentrate well, work hard and enjoy lessons. There is some inconsistency in the quality of marking between and across subjects and systems employed to assess their work. This does not impact unduly on their enviable work rate. Within lessons, recent initiatives are being used well to help pupils assess their own learning better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum serves the needs of pupils well. Senior and middle leaders exploit their very good knowledge of the needs of different groups of girls to adapt the curriculum regularly and sensitively. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form where an excellent curriculum enables all students to tailor their own individual courses. Sports College status helps girls to achieve high standards not only in physical education but also in their other subjects and in their personal development. The school is very proactive and successful in identifying and intervening to assist pupils who would benefit from a more personalised learning programme. ICT has been improved since the last inspection, but is not yet a strength of the school and there are limitations in the structure of the personal, social, health and citizenship education programme due to timetable restrictions. Vocational education is now being developed further in Key Stage 4 and effective progression routes for potential and actual sixth form students are being established to cater more fully for the wider community. Extra-curricular provision, in quality and quantity, is outstanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school considers care, guidance and support for pupils to be good, but the inspection team considers these to be outstanding. All adults give unstintingly of their

time to help and support all pupils in the school. The pupils appreciate this and know they can turn to an adult in confidence if they need to. The quality of individual support for sixth form pupils, whether for personal or academic problems, is outstanding. Procedures for care are very strongly embedded in the ethos of the school. Child protection arrangements are well established and fully understood by staff. The schools health and safety and risk assessment systems are fully in place and are frequently monitored. Pupils in the main school are supported very well in staying safe and were recently trained in 'stranger danger' and in the importance of sexual and personal health. Overall, in a safe and supportive environment, learners meet challenging targets and are well informed about their future options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school considers its leadership and management to be good. The inspection team judged them to be outstanding. The headteacher and senior leaders are seen by staff as very approachable and actively involved in the school's daily life. Most parents and governors are very supportive of the school and of the headteacher's very consultative management style. He sets a very clear direction, sharing his vision for the school with the senior leadership team and all staff. The pupils and students are at the heart of it. Considerable effort and investment is committed to tailor courses to the needs and personal choices of all pupils. An unremitting focus on improvement drives the school's planning and challenges all in the school community to improve continuously. Planning is informed by performance management and, as far as possible, by pupils' views. The headteacher embraces many new initiatives which benefit the school and the community. The school's specialist sports status is an example of this, raising the school's profile locally and more widely. Outside partnerships such as Leading Edge projects also contribute much value to pupils' learning.

New developments are already very effectively monitored and further gains could be made by ensuring an even sharper focus on precise outcomes for pupils. Since the last inspection, there has been considerable investment in ICT equipment and pupils' ICT learning across the curriculum is more effectively monitored. Opportunities for collective worship have improved and there has been progress on developing pupils' independence in learning.

Resources are very competently managed to raise standards so that the school provides good value for money. There have been many improvements in accommodation and further ambitious projects are planned, including extension of the music area.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Following our visit to inspect your school we would like to tell you about the things we found out. We enjoyed talking with you and we were impressed by your sense of responsibility and your confidence. We learned that most of you enjoy coming to Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College very much because it is an outstanding school where you progress well and feel safe. You told us that you have good relationships with your teachers and that there is always someone on the staff who you can talk to if you have any problems. Teaching is good and your teachers know a great deal about their subjects. This, and your generally good behaviour and hard work, helps to explain why the school's examination results are generally well above average.

The school's buildings have improved a great deal since the last inspection and more improvements are planned. We are sure that when these are finished it should help you to enjoy being at school even more. Although the school is doing lots of things very well, we think that it can do even better. The improvements needed are:

- making sure, when new developments are planned for the school, that the ways in which they will help your learning are very clear
- improving what is on offer for you in ICT to make it as good as in other subjects
- offering you a wider range of vocational subjects.

We would like to thank those of you who talked to us and let us know what you think of the school. We found this very helpful. I would also like to wish you all every success for your future at Sandbach High School.