



# Stowmarket High School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 124818  
**LEA** SUFFOLK LEA  
**Inspection number** 281813  
**Inspection dates** 8 February 2006 to 9 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mr. Harmer Parr LI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Onehouse Road
<b>School category</b>	Foundation		IP14 1QR
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13 to 18		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01449613541
<b>Number on roll</b>	1050	<b>Fax number</b>	01449770436
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr. Douglas Chivers
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	22 May 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr. David Oliver

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

This is an average-sized upper school serving the town of Stowmarket and its surrounding rural area. Almost all students including just under a quarter of them in the sixth form, are from a White British background and speak English as their first language. Relatively few are entitled to free school meals. A small but rising number has learning difficulties or disabilities. The school achieved specialist technology status in 2001. It has now been invited to become a Leading School, with humanities as a second specialism.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

A high number of parents returned a questionnaire to the inspection team. The vast majority were highly satisfied and said it was a good school. They were right. It is, and it gives good value for money. Almost all students make good progress. The examination results they achieve at ages 14 and 16 are good, showing a steady improvement since the last inspection. Friendly relationships create the right climate for students to learn and behave well and for teachers to use their knowledge and expertise. The students who have learning or behavioural difficulties are supported extremely well. Students with talents are encouraged to develop them, both within the curriculum and through the rich variety of activities on offer beyond the school day. A few areas stand out as weaknesses within this strong picture. Attendance is not as good as it could be. Too many students are excluded at the moment because the sanctions policy is applied inflexibly. The curriculum from Year 10 onwards does not provide enough opportunities for practical and vocational learning and some of the teaching in Years 9 to 11 is not good enough. Students are not encouraged to participate actively in some lessons, and do not have well-established ways of giving their views about matters that affect them in school. The school's strengths far outnumber its weaknesses. Because it is self-critical, it has correctly assessed its effectiveness as good, but has also accurately identified its weaker areas and developed plans to tackle them. This is why it is well placed to improve further. The school's status as a specialist school has provided impetus for the improvements over the last few years. More important still has been the clear-sighted, caring and determined leadership of the headteacher, who has established the conditions where staff, governors and ultimately students can give their best.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Inspectors confirm the school's view that the effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Initiatives to bring about improvement are recent, and have yet to make a difference. Students are well supported, develop well and have a mature attitude to their work. They are well prepared for higher education and training. The extensive range of A and AS level courses is balanced by a currently limited range of vocational options. The school is working with partners to tackle this issue and give students more ways to progress.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Monitor absence more closely to detect problems or patterns and follow up rapidly.
- Improve teachers' planning of lessons to ensure that students know what they are expected to learn and that teachers encourage practical activities.
- Provide more vocational options in the curriculum for 14 to 19 year-olds.
- Develop structured ways for students to give their views and be involved in decision-making.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Students achieve good standards at the ages of 14 and 16. From a broadly average position when they enter the school, the standards they reach are above average on all measures by the age of 16. Progress has accelerated in the last two years, leading to a rising trend in examination results. Because of its specialist status, the school had to set a number of challenging targets, achieving most of them. Year 9 students who took the national tests in 2005 had made good progress in science since the age of 11 and exceptional progress in English and mathematics. Improvement at GCSE was similarly marked: in 2005, more than half the students achieved five or more grades A\*-C including English and mathematics, a higher proportion than in most schools. Although results in science were also good, fewer students than in English and mathematics fulfilled or exceeded predictions based on previous national tests. All groups in the school, including those with learning difficulties, achieved well, with the exception of a few students who fell short of the standards expected. The significant variation in results at AS and A levels supports the school's view that achievement and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory rather than good. Very good achievement in some subjects, including the vocational course in business studies, is balanced by weaker performance elsewhere.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The personal development of students is good. The vast majority are well behaved, courteous and get on well with each other. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and are helped to appreciate other cultures. They enjoy coming to school and speak highly of the support they receive from staff. The rate of attendance is similar to that of most schools, but lower than it might be in this one, in spite of the school's best efforts. Some students do not attend regularly enough because patterns of absence are not consistently detected and followed up quickly. Too many students are excluded at the moment because of the rigorous sanctions code. The school rightly feels that the time is right to review the code and introduce more preventative measures. All students feel safe and secure. They are encouraged to adopt a healthy life style through an outstanding range of sport and leisure activities and a clever system that rewards them for choosing healthy meals. Many make significant contributions to the local community, notably with the Junior Sports Leader Award where they work with primary and special schools and with adults who have learning needs. Some sixth formers act as mentors for younger students. The school prepares students well for working life by developing their confidence with reading, writing and number, and particularly in the use of computers. They do not yet have enough opportunities to work in teams, to show initiative or to contribute their views about how the school is run.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The inspection confirmed the school's view that teaching and learning are good in the main school, but satisfactory in the sixth form, where the quality is less consistent. Sustained, caring, systematic teaching has created a climate where students can learn well and make good progress. Good relationships between students and teachers are the norm. In the best lessons, the teachers displayed a strong knowledge of their subject and carried students along with humour and a sense of purpose. They asked penetrating and challenging questions which led to lively discussion. As a result, most students enjoyed their lessons and worked hard. The more able, in particular, thrived on this approach. In some lessons, mainly in lower sets, the teachers did not plan well enough to motivate and involve the students. As a result, they either misbehaved or worked at too slow a pace, both of these leading to underachievement. The planning was not sharp and the activities were not practical. A small number of lessons presented a strong contrast. The students were told what they were expected to achieve in the lesson. Activities were timed to meet the deadline, creating a sense of urgency and purpose. The students engaged busily in practical activities which got them moving about and learning for themselves. These approaches were particularly effective with some students in Years 9 to 11 who were reported to be disruptive in other lessons.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. An extensive and expanding range of courses serves most students well, particularly the most able. They can study up to 13 GCSE subjects including two modern foreign languages, statistics and an extended course in information technology. The range of A and AS level courses offered in the sixth form is extensive. Students are appreciative of the access programme which gives those who failed first time a second chance to gain the grades they need. One or two even admitted it was more than they deserved. The school knows that the range of what is on offer from 14 to 19 is not wide enough to cater fully for all students. It therefore plans to work with partners to develop more vocational courses. All students in the main school follow a comprehensive and effective programme of personal, social and health education. The many extra activities the school provides - clubs, visits, music, drama, outdoor activities - have a positive impact on the way students feel about the school and the way they develop as people. Over a third of students participate in an outstanding sporting programme. The school's status as a specialist college has brought with it significant resources which are well used to the benefit of students in the school and in the wider community.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support for students are good, and, for those with learning and behavioural needs, outstanding. Students and parents appreciate the help they get, for example from learning mentors. They also like the new consultation days where student, parents and teacher can have a three-way discussion. The school sets challenging targets and checks progress carefully, but the students themselves are not always aware of how the targets relate to their day-to-day work in the classroom. In a very small number of cases, students whose achievement or attendance tail off are not picked up quickly enough and their results suffer. The most vulnerable students are exceptionally well supported by the learning support assistants. This close attention to the needs of the students who have difficulties with learning or behaviour, or who learn at different rates, is not always matched in the planning of lessons by subject teachers. Students at risk or in care are monitored carefully, and there are sound procedures for child protection. Careers guidance is good and students have access to a well-stocked careers library.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher has been particularly effective in giving the school a clear direction and in taking others along with him. He has led the school through a period of sustained progress. He has created an atmosphere where teachers and managers have the confidence to be self-critical and to try things out. The senior management team is strong and committed, and ensures that strategic planning is of high quality. The leadership and day-to-day management of the sixth form are largely effective, but the school rightly identifies them as areas for development. The initiatives it has begun have not had time to make a difference. A comprehensive faculty review system has improved the quality of self-evaluation, which is strong at all levels. Departments make good use of the more sophisticated assessment data to check progress and to set targets. Making the data available to the teachers and explaining its significance have been key ways of raising their expectations of what students can achieve. Teachers receive good professional development. The school has sensible plans to use the expertise of key staff to develop approaches to assessment and provide more practical activities in lessons. Assessments of the quality of teaching are accurate, apart from the few occasions when they avoid the judgement that the lesson is not good enough. The school has used its specialist status well to improve its resources, particularly in the shape of computers and white boards which are used effectively. The governing body provides strong backing for the school and is highly effective in its role as 'critical friend'. Financial planning is secure.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
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

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
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
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
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**

Thank you for your contribution to the inspection of your school. We thoroughly enjoyed our time with you. Thank you for making us so welcome. You told us that you thought it was a good school, and we agree. Before we came, we had noticed that the examination results kept improving year by year. This is what we found out. You usually try your best in a caring atmosphere and you are encouraged by your hard-working teachers. They set you targets and you try to meet them. They encourage you to get involved in the community, and you do. If you have particular difficulties with learning or behaviour, the support teachers are especially helpful. You have a big choice of subjects on your timetable and an equally big choice of things to do after school. The sports activities on offer are especially impressive. Not everything in the garden is rosy, of course! Some of you are absent too often, and a few of you get excluded for not following the rules. You told us that you do not have enough ways of making your views heard in school, and we agree. You told us that a few of your lessons were not good enough. We agree with that too. It was usually when the lesson was not very interesting or when you had to sit and listen for too long without being actively involved. That was when a few of you misbehaved. It was one of the reasons why we thought there should be more practical courses in your choice of options. When we came to sum up our findings, we decided that there were many more things right than wrong. You will not be surprised, from what I have already said, that we asked the school to check absences more closely (you can help by being there!), improve the planning of lessons so that you are involved more, develop more practical courses for you to choose and give you more ways to express your views and influence what happens. You are fortunate in going to a good school. You can now get involved in making it even better. Good luck!