

Stowupland High School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 124853 |
| Local Authority | SUFFOLK LA |
| Inspection number | 315084 |
| Inspection dates | 21–22 November 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Stephen Grounds HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 13–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 707 |
| 6th form | 167 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Ian Gallagher |
| Headteacher | Mrs Karen Grimes |
| Date of previous school inspection | 27 September 2004 |
| School address | Church Road Stowupland Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 4BQ |
| Telephone number | 01449674827 |
| Fax number | 01449774859 |

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|--------------------------|---------------------|
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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

Stowupland High School is a smaller than average upper school serving a large rural catchment area. Almost all its students are from a White British background with very low numbers speaking English as an additional language. Relatively small numbers of students are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is about two-thirds the national average but rising. Since the previous inspection, the school has had specialist college status in mathematics and in information and communication technology (ICT). There is some sharing of sixth form teaching with Stowmarket High School and plans are in place to establish a Joint Committee with statutory powers to oversee joint provision across the two schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The academic performance of Stowupland High School is close to national averages. Its own judgement is that its overall effectiveness, efficiency and degree of inclusion in meeting the needs of its students are satisfactory. Inspectors agree with this judgement. The school's self-evaluation clearly indicates that its headteacher and its senior staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths as well as what the school needs to do in order to improve.

From starting points close to national averages students achieve satisfactorily at all levels. Their performance in the Key Stage 3 tests at the end of Year 9 is above average. The performance at GCSE, as measured by the percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C passes, has fluctuated over the last four years but has, overall, been close to national averages. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress, in line with other students. The pass rate at A level is high and most students continue into higher education.

The recently improved academic performance derives from the teaching and the curriculum. Teaching is judged by the school itself, and corroborated by the inspection, to be satisfactory; the curriculum is considered by inspectors to be satisfactory in the main school and good in Years 12 and 13. As far as teaching is concerned, some outstanding practice was seen. For example, in an impeccably planned and delivered lesson in American history the match to students' current development was very good. For the students, the end of this lesson came far too soon. This type of outstanding practice needs to be better disseminated given that in some other lessons, particularly with lower sets, the planning did not fully engage students in what they had to learn and this reduced the level of achievement. Behaviour was orderly in most lessons, but some low level disruption of a verbal kind was seen, a feature which was commented on by a significant number of the small minority of parents who completed the Ofsted questionnaire. As far as the curriculum is concerned the school has remedied some shortcomings evident at its last inspection. It considers that its recent changes have contributed to a better match to students' needs and in turn led to improved motivation or results. However, the impact of the school's specialism in numeracy and ICT across the curriculum is not as strong as it should be.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students' demeanour in and around the school is good and in these settings inspectors saw no evidence of poor behaviour. Students say that they are welcomed in the school and emphatically say that bullying is not an issue. There is a good take up of opportunities of the extended curriculum including the Tuesday evening events. Nevertheless some aspects of personal development are not yet as strong as they might be. These include the use of ICT, the promotion of independent learning and the way both can increase the enjoyment of learning whilst fostering skills leading to students' future economic well-being. All the outcomes for students described are supported by a level of care and support which is strong in terms of pastoral guidance but undeveloped in respect of academic guidance. Child protection arrangements, for example are robust and well managed. Good strategies exist to support a high attendance rate and there is good use of systems to support careers progression. An undeveloped aspect, is the extent to which students are informed about their academic progress and aware of the targets to which they are aiming. The monitoring of progress and academic support of all learners is not yet embedded leading to students being inadequately challenged.

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. Sound steps to improve have been made since the previous inspection, but this has also been a period when financial issues have come to a head, leading to a series of staffing difficulties, including redundancies and long-term sickness. A challenging programme of reform, planning and improvement has been ably led by the new headteacher whose collaborative but determined approach is shared across the senior leadership team and middle managers. A new staffing structure has been adopted and a number of reforms in procedures to underpin and prioritise teaching and learning have been put in place. However, there are workload pressures, notably on senior managers, which the school needs to review. Improvement is already evident in several respects, notably in the physical environment, behaviour, attendance and the improved 2007 examination results. Although much remains to be done, all these elements are part of copious evidence of the school's strong capacity for improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Inspectors confirm the school's view that the effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Attainment has been close to national averages. The recently strengthened sixth form leadership is improving the provision, notably in the monitoring and supporting of students' progress, but this has yet to be reflected in improved standards. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and good in some courses. Teachers are well informed and committed to students' progress but past inconsistencies in course organisation and assessment practice have slowed the school's efforts to raise standards. The school recognises the need to increase staffing to establish these improvements and support the day-to-day running of the sixth form.

The curriculum meets the local need. The school's own sixth form courses as well as those jointly provided give students much choice. A strong sense of community is evident and students show initiative in organising their own social activities. Their personal development is considerably enhanced by their contribution to the school through mentoring and learning support work as well as outside voluntary work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Disseminate the school's best practice in teaching and the use of target setting in order to improve teaching and learning
- Further review the staffing of the school, especially at a senior level, in order to underpin the school's good capacity for improvement
- Ensure that the school's specialist school status impacts better across all the subjects especially in the provision of cross-curricular numeracy and ICT.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

All students, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make satisfactory progress. For the three years to 2006, the overall index of value added performance, measuring the progress made by students in their time in the school, has been at or above the national average, although falling. The school's own data indicate that for 2007 the falling trend will have been reversed.

Test results at Key Stage 3 have fluctuated but have always been above average, often significantly so. The 2007 results showed a sharp improvement in mathematics and science. Improved data analysis is enabling the school to identify and respond to weaker groups of students or subjects. The school's statutory targets were met in mathematics and science but the school fell short in English.

At the end of Key Stage 4, the school's examination results have been slightly above national levels with the exception of 2006. The percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades is at the national average and has risen from 58% in 2004 to 65% in 2007, the school's best results ever. Even so the school failed in 2007 to meet its statutory targets with the exception of those for five or more A* to G grades. Overall, across the years of compulsory schooling, progress is satisfactory. Girls continue to outperform boys although the gap has narrowed. High performing subjects in 2007 were drama, English, German, religious education and science.

Over the past four years the school has met all but one of its Specialist School targets for mathematics at Key Stage 3, but has been unsuccessful at Key Stage 4. The pattern of success in the sixth form is mixed. Inspectors judged the 2008 targets to be appropriately challenging.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are good. Students have a good awareness of other cultures, for example, from work in geography with students researching with the aid of the internet the recent cyclone in Bangladesh. Students feel safe and secure. The school's exclusion rates are low and have been reduced and there was only one reported incidence of racism in the last year. Students respond well when treated in a more mature fashion and mostly exhibit good attitudes to each other and to staff in and around the school.

The citizenship programme and the use of internet access to live news bulletins during registration periods is used well to support and extend students' better understanding of current affairs. Locally, students have been involved in designing new building plans in school and in contributing to the local parish plan. In geography some are working with a local councillor to look at ways of developing Stowmarket as a more sustainable town and in a way which supports community cohesion.

Lack of challenge in some lessons results in low-level behaviour which impacts on students' engagement and enjoyment of learning. Students in Key Stage 4 are aware of this and feel that there needs to be more consistency in the teaching and learning and in the staffing of some subjects. Students are increasingly developing and leading more healthy lifestyles. The main factors that influence this are the improved food service, new facilities and the availability of a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

In their lesson observations, inspectors saw a full range of quality including two outstanding lessons and two with important shortcomings. Most lessons were good or satisfactory and the assessments corroborated for the most part, those of the school's senior management. Good lessons were characterised by teachers having good subject knowledge, good planning with effective plenary sessions, brisk pace and the use of imaginative teaching methods, effective group work and developed assessment and tracking systems. These demonstrate the positive impact of recent school initiatives.

Satisfactory lessons were frequently ones where students were passively listening to teachers and so not fully engaged. In such lessons the use of ICT and assessment was also variable. Identified learning outcomes were often not shared with students, and the planning for the varied levels of ability in the class was often tokenistic.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is broad and balanced. Inspectors agree with the school's own judgement that it is satisfactory. Improvements have been made since the last inspection in the provision for citizenship and work-related learning. The curriculum has strengths in vocational courses and there is a strong structure supporting careers. German has been introduced at Key Stage 3 and a range of alternative science offerings, including triple science at Key Stage 4. In the sixth form there are 25 courses of A2- or AS- level including five which are applied. In Year 12 all students now study general studies and almost all do community service. The extended curriculum is impressive; very significant, for example, is the Duke of Edinburgh scheme which is well regarded and supported by students. However, in two important aspects the curriculum is underdeveloped. The first is in the promotion of numeracy and literacy in subjects other than mathematics and English. The second is in ICT where, although the specialist college status has resulted in an improvement in the extent to which departments have equipment, the use of it to widen the approaches to teaching and learning is less pronounced.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory with some good elements. Support for all students is good and the internal and external inclusion units coupled with the work of the inclusion manager are all key aspects of this success. The school's low exclusion rates are evidence of this working. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported well by the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) and her team. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection. The willingness of these staff to engage in training and to take part in multi-agency working, contributes to effective student support and guidance in all of the key stages. Careers progression for all learners is in place and the wealth of resources and

communication leaflets to support this is informative and helpful. Careers, Connexions, and other support staff are also sources of this strength.

A shortcoming is the extent to which learners are informed about their academic progress. The monitoring of achievement and academic support for all learners is not embedded, resulting in inadequate levels of challenge.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The leadership of the school, under the inspiration of the headteacher, is setting a clear direction leading to improvement and promoting the well-being of learners. A common vision and understanding of this is shared by middle managers and most staff. Developmental planning is focussed on teaching and learning. The management structures have been reformed, there is improved accountability of heads of department through performance management and there is a greatly improved and more intelligent use of test and other data on students' subject performance. Heads of department replicate the general procedures of the senior leadership team in the management of their departments. The school's self-evaluation is good, showing that the leadership has a good understanding of the school and what it needs to do to improve. The school sets challenging targets which are ambitious in what the school wishes to accomplish but at present the school is falling short of its ambitions. The school provides satisfactory value for money. Good improvements have been made to the physical state of parts of the school but the staffing of the school is stretched, in part as a result of illness, and especially in what falls on senior managers. In this respect the secondment of an acting deputy head is a welcome feature. Governors discharge their responsibilities well. They are strongly supportive of the headteacher and have established a very positive collaborative way of working with her. She in turn keeps them well informed and copious time is given to full discussions of her extensive reports on the school. The chair of governors is well informed of the teaching and learning issues which are the core of the school's direction.

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Inspection judgements

| | | |
|---|----------------|-------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall | 16-19 |
|---|----------------|-------|

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|---|-----|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 | 2 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 | |

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 | |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 3 | |
| The attendance of learners | 2 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 | |
| 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 | 3 | |

The quality of provision

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

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 | 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 3 | |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | 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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 | |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 | |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No | |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No | |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Stowupland High School, Suffolk, IP14 4BQ

Thank you for your participation in our short inspection. It broadly confirmed the school's self-assessment of where it stands at present. We and the school judged that you make sound academic progress as you go through the school, taking into account your levels of performance when you arrive from middle schools. Overall, across the main school, students' progress is broadly average. The same is true of the actual results at GCSE, although inspectors were pleased that last summer's results show a welcome upward step. Sixth formers also perform at levels which are in line with other sixth forms.

We agreed with the school that teaching and learning are overall satisfactory. Some of it is outstanding and we think that the school has the capacity to widen this very good practice. Where we saw very good teaching, students really wanted to learn. Unfortunately we noted that a small number of lessons were impaired by low level poor behaviour. This can distract teachers and slows down the progress of those students wishing to learn and this is something where you can help to improve things. Nevertheless we think that your own personal development and well-being are good. We were impressed at the range of things that you do outside lessons and in the sixth form we thought that the way you organise things for yourselves and others is a strength.

We judged that the curriculum has many good features and we noted that recent improvements, such as the range of science courses at Key Stage 4, has improved motivation and success. But we feel that more needs to be done to embed numeracy and literacy as well as the use of ICT across all subjects. We also judged that the care, guidance and support the school gives you is good on the pastoral side but that more can be done to support you in making progress on the academic side.

We consider that the headteacher and the senior staff have a good understanding of what the school needs to do to improve. This, as in all schools, is a process that means lots of hard work and we trust that you will give your teachers the support that will help you.

In summary we have recommended to the school that it increases the extent to which teachers share good practice and that it looks to see how its specialist areas, that is mathematics and ICT, but also literacy, are strengthened in the teaching and learning of all subjects. We have also asked it to review some of the senior staffing loads.

The inspection team wish you well with your studies and your futures.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Grounds (HMI)

Lead Inspector