

Sale High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106375
Local Authority	Trafford
Inspection number	324387
Inspection dates	13–14 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Jon Lovgreen

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	838
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alex Erwin
Headteacher	Mrs Kathleen Leaver
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2006
School address	Norris Road Sale Cheshire M33 3JR
Telephone number	0161 9732713
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Sale High School is average in size, with a higher proportion of boys than girls. Selection by local grammar schools results in the school having a much smaller proportion of higher attaining students than is typically the case. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is broadly average. Up to one third of the school population travels in from a neighbouring local authority. The school is a specialist technology college. It has been recognised by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust for its improved results, students' progress, and the quality of its provision for all students. Other accreditation includes Investors in People, Sportsmark (Silver) and the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Sale High School is a good school which has improved significantly in a short space of time. This is recognised by parents and students alike, many of whom praise the progress that the school has made. Since the last inspection, standards have risen and the quality of teaching and learning has improved. Management, including that provided by senior leaders and the governing body, has also improved. As a result leaders are well informed about school improvement. Concerted efforts have seen both persistent absenteeism reduced and punctuality improve.

Students' achievement is good in relation to their low attainment on entry and standards are rising. Current standards are broadly average. While standards in mathematics are improving, they are still not high enough. GCSE results in history have been weak for several years. In contrast, English results show students making exceptionally good progress. A major change since the last inspection has been in the students' attitudes. The majority of students are now proud of the school and committed to it. They enjoy lessons, work maturely, and cooperate well with teachers and each other. Behaviour overall is good. However, the immature behaviour of a small minority of boys let the side down at times. Bullying is no longer a concern for students. Should it happen, students know it will be dealt with. Students appreciate that good computer and literacy skills, improving numeracy skills and good opportunities for teamwork in school are preparing them well for the future. Teaching is good. Well-planned and interesting lessons are the norm. Classrooms are well organised and well managed. While much class discussion is good, more could be made of following up and exploring ideas to enhance understanding. This would benefit all students, but especially those higher attainers whose achievement is satisfactory rather than good. The quality of teaching is monitored rigorously by senior staff. The curriculum is good, reflecting the technology specialism and benefiting from regular review.

The headteacher's passionate belief that students deserve the best, coupled with a determination to bring this about, has been the main catalyst for change. Expectations are high, and are shared by all senior leaders, and the majority of middle managers and teachers. Monitoring is regular and accurate, enabling improvement planning to be more precise. A better-informed governing body is now effective in its role of support and challenge. All of this results in a school which gives good value for money. The impetus and desire to do even better, coupled with accurate evaluation, results in the school having good capacity for further improvement.

Resources are used carefully and the enhanced budget monitored rigorously. Standards are improving overall and the school has a clear awareness of where shortfalls in performance are, and plans practical strategies to improve provision. Specialist school status is beginning to contribute to raising standards and is helping to forge closer links to the community, for example, through its work with partner schools. Leadership of the specialism, and management of most specialist subjects, is secure.

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate students' achievement, especially in mathematics and history.
- Provide more opportunities for students, especially higher attainers, to explore and extend their ideas and understanding.
- Take steps to minimise the occasional disruption to learning caused by a minority of boys.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good. Standards at Key Stage 3 are rising. Students met challenging targets in English and mathematics in the unvalidated 2008 tests. For the past three years, GCSE results have been slightly below the national average but no groups of students underachieved and most made good progress during their time in school. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The progress of the small number of higher attaining students is satisfactory. Girls tend to do better than boys. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C passes at GCSE, including mathematics and English, rose significantly in 2008 compared to the previous year. Results in English show students doing exceptionally well. Mathematics results in 2008 remained well below the national average but improved significantly. The school's specialism results in high proportions of students taking mathematics, science and a technology. Of the challenging specialist school targets set for 2008, only those in science were reached. Inspection evidence shows specialist subjects to be on track to meet challenging targets this year. This is because standards in mathematics continue to improve and results in design and technology are rising.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Students use opportunities for reflection in assemblies and form time well. They show each other and visitors respect, and most develop a strong sense of right and wrong. Their involvement with a school in Pakistan and enthusiasm for learning about what lies behind other cultures helps them appreciate how others live, and what their beliefs are. The majority adopt a healthy lifestyle, participating in sports and other opportunities for physical exercise. The behaviour of the vast majority of students in lessons and around school is good, but a minority of boys do not respond consistently to the school's expectations of them. Attendance is rising steadily and is now approaching the national average. The number of students who are persistent absentees has reduced. Students enjoy school and are proud of it. They are very appreciative of the support provided for them by their teachers. There is an effective, elected school council that has played an active part in improving school organisation. There are numerous links with local, national and international bodies and students are active community partners on a number of levels. Students' skills and personal qualities make a good contribution to preparing them for life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and provide good opportunities for group work. Students develop independent learning skills as a result. They have very positive attitudes to work. Teachers generally manage behaviour well. Nevertheless, a small number of boys are not always fully engaged in their learning. Most teaching is good at explaining the point of a lesson or piece of work. This, coupled with regular marking, gives students a clear understanding of how they can improve. Data are used effectively to check progress and set students targets which they understand and can work to. Question and answer sessions are

regular features of lessons. However, teachers do not pursue opportunities to probe deeper in order to challenge and develop students' ideas and understanding. This limits the progress of higher attaining students. A variety of teaching methods, often with practical approaches, is used to interest learners. Interactive whiteboards are used well in some lessons to stimulate and reinforce learning. The work of teaching assistants is a strength. As a result, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities get the precise help and support they need to make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Recent curriculum developments and a review of vocational provision is resulting in a better match between the needs of students and the courses offered. Open access to a wider range of courses at Key Stage 4 ensures that all students can choose a suitable pathway. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is good. Its greater use in other subjects helps learning. Extra time has been allocated for mathematics in Years 9 and 11, and the imaginative use of 'Flexible Friday' allows Year 7 students to study themes across subjects. The specialism is well catered for by the insistence on all students following examination courses at Key Stage 4 in ICT and design technology. Students' progress in Religious education at Key Stage 4 is limited because there is too much content to cover in the time allocated. Additional activities for example, sports' clubs and musical activities at lunchtime enhance the curriculum and pupils' wider learning and social experiences. A good range of trips and extra-curricular activities is well supported by students. Highly valued residential visits, including those to France and Spain, widen their awareness of other cultures and lifestyles.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has a range of effective systems for providing care, support and guidance. These have, for instance, resulted in improvements in attendance and punctuality. Very effective support for vulnerable students is provided through the inclusion, care and education centre, which helps them tackle difficulties and reintegrate gradually into lessons. There is detailed assessment of the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Good support is provided for them and their progress is mapped carefully. Guidance for students about making option choices at the end of Year 9 and decisions about education or employment post-16 is good. Academic guidance is also good. It enables students to understand clearly what they have achieved and what they need to do to make further progress. Statutory requirements for health and safety, child protection and for checking the suitability of adults who work with children are fully in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's strong leadership provides clear direction for improving standards. The senior leadership team and middle managers share a common sense of purpose in implementing this. The system of devolved leadership responsibilities carries with it clear accountability for work in departments. Rising standards indicate the effectiveness of this approach. Because the school's self-evaluation procedures are comprehensive, senior managers have a good view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They recognise that despite considerable improvement,

for example in standards in mathematics, there is still work to do to ensure that momentum is sustained. Good use is made of the diversity of students' backgrounds to promote community cohesion successfully. Parents have contributed by sharing examples of their own cultural knowledge and skills. The school has raised students' sensitivity to the needs of others and the challenges they face. Such awareness is enhanced by contacts with other schools, including one abroad. Opportunities are identified across the curriculum to help students understand and appreciate different cultures and global issues. Above all, the school's leadership has developed the school as an inclusive community. This is evident in the way that students from all backgrounds work well together and support one another in lessons. The governing body is well informed and able to hold the school to account for its performance. The deployment of resources is good because initiatives are checked carefully to ensure that they are effective. The school's specialism is managed with energy and enthusiasm. This is beginning to have a positive impact on raising standards. The school is discharging its wider responsibilities as a specialist college effectively through partnerships in the local community.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

As you know, we inspected your school recently and this letter is to tell you what we found. First, our thanks for being so helpful, welcoming, and willing to talk to us.

Yours is a good school, which continues to improve. Your headteacher is determined to raise standards in the school and get the best for you. Other school managers and the governing body are also working hard on your behalf. Results are improving because teaching is good and so you enjoy most lessons. Importantly, you are proud of your school. You appreciate the efforts teachers are making and most of you accept the responsibility you have for your own progress, and that of others. While your behaviour is good, a small minority of boys need to make more of an effort to knuckle down to work. Lessons are interesting and you like the more active and practical approaches that most teachers plan. You express your ideas clearly and well. We think that teachers could make better use of this to delve into your ideas more in order to get you really thinking. We were very impressed with your work in English. Results in science, mathematics and technology are getting better. However, you do still need to improve GCSE results, especially in mathematics and history. The school takes good care of you. You are happy and feel that all adults do a lot to help and support you. Because of this, your attendance is improving steadily and fewer of you come to school late. It is very important that these things continue to improve. Missed lessons are missed opportunities.

We have asked the school to:

- help you to make better progress in mathematics and history.
- make sure that lessons give all of you, but especially those of you who are more able, time to explore ideas and your own understanding of them.
- improve the behaviour of a minority of boys.

You can help by keeping up your positive attitudes to school and work, and following the good advice teachers give. Those targets you work to are there for you to beat!