

Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111406
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325373
Inspection date	23 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Julie Price Grimshaw

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	1396
Sixth form	320
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian McGivern
Headteacher	Mr J Leigh
Date of previous school inspection	9 November 2005
School address	Middlewich Road Sandbach Cheshire CW11 3NT
Telephone number	01270 765031
Fax number	01270 768544

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the progress currently being made by students; the quality of academic guidance in supporting students' achievement; the impact of the school's specialist status. Evidence was gathered from published assessment data, the school's own records, parents' questionnaires, lesson observations and interviews with staff, pupils and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This larger than average school is situated in an area of relative social and economic advantage. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below the national average, as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has specialist status in sports, languages and applied learning. It is also a Leading Edge school and a Training School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Students and staff are proud to be part of this outstanding school. Having built on the successes highlighted at the time of the previous inspection, the school has gone from strength to strength, as shown in the excellent outcomes for its students. The vast majority of parents are delighted with the school's work, evident in comments such as, 'my daughter has truly flourished since starting school', and, 'we are extremely happy with the fantastic results and progress. We could not be more pleased.'

Students enter in Year 7 with above average standards. The school wastes no time in building on this, and as a result of high quality teaching and excellent academic guidance, almost all students make outstanding progress to reach standards that are exceptionally high. Overall, examination results at the end of Key Stage 4 have shown a year-on-year improvement since 2004. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades is well above average across a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics, science, drama, dance, physical education, and design and technology. Students with learning difficulties are well supported and make good, rather than outstanding progress overall. Recently, the school has modified its systems for monitoring the progress of such students, and this is now beginning to have a positive impact. By pinpointing specific areas of need, the new systems help staff to intervene swiftly and provide focused support. As a result, the progress of students with learning difficulties is now beginning to accelerate.

As a specialist sports college, the school is extremely successful in promoting the development of students' self-esteem, self-confidence and raised aspirations. Students have an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles and participation rates in sporting activities are very high. Very high quality pastoral care supports their outstanding personal development, and statutory requirements for safeguarding students are met. Students have in-depth knowledge of safety related issues, including Internet safety, as a result of the school's exemplary work in this area. Almost all students behave exceptionally well and their attitudes to learning are a key factor in their outstanding achievement. Students are supportive of each other, and any conflicts are effectively and sensitively resolved with the help of staff. Strong links with schools in South Africa are effective in developing students' moral, social and cultural awareness. Students are extremely well prepared for future education and the world of work. They have excellent basic skills and benefit from involvement in business ventures such as the new restaurant being run by the school. As part of its work as a specialist language college, the school has carried out some excellent work on tracking pupils' achievement.

The overall quality of teaching in the main school is good, with some excellent practice. Lessons are well planned, with carefully thought out content that provides a high level of challenge for students. There is a great deal of emphasis on students developing independent learning skills, and they respond very well to this. Marking of work provides detailed and constructive advice to students. The great majority of established members of staff have consolidated this very good practice, and new teachers are supported in adopting the typical features found in exemplary lessons across the school. A first-rate curriculum ensures that the needs and interests of all students are fully met. The school has responded very well to the recommendation in the previous inspection report regarding the increase in vocational programmes, and such courses are now widely available. Students have a very good choice of extra-curricular activities, and the curriculum is enhanced through a range of exciting and informative trips out of school.

As part of its work as a Leading Edge school, the school involved students in a project aimed at developing assessment practice and procedures. This involved students and staff working with a number of other schools within the local community. As a result, a school-wide system was developed, and this is used very successfully, not just by teachers assessing students' work, but also by the students themselves in assessing their own and each other's work. Sharply focused monitoring and tracking of individual students' progress contributes to their outstanding achievement and attainment.

The school's success is due largely to the relentless drive of its leaders and managers, including the headteacher, who has maintained a consistent focus on encouraging staff and pupils to aim as high as possible. One parent expressed a typical view in the comment, 'The headteacher manages a motivated staff and school – it's a credit to him.' There is an established and highly effective cycle of monitoring, evaluation and action planning involving a range of leaders and managers. Governors show good levels of commitment to the school and assist school leaders by exploring issues in much detail. The school has fully addressed all issues raised at the last inspection and has excellent capacity for ongoing improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Outstanding teaching and leadership together with an exemplary curriculum lead to excellent achievement, standards and personal development for students in the sixth form. Students speak with much enthusiasm about their learning, saying, 'our teachers are fantastic', and, 'people are so friendly and helpful'. They recognise the excellent subject knowledge of their teachers, and are enthused and motivated by this. Teachers consistently model exemplary practice in their subjects, particularly in vocational subjects. Students capitalise on the excellent relationships that have been established with staff during their time in the main school, and are skilled as independent learners. All of this, combined with the opportunity to follow a highly personalised programme of study, results in outstanding achievement, and standards that have shown an upward trend over recent years. However, the success of the sixth form has led to increased numbers, and both students and parents raised concerns about the cramped accommodation in the sixth form area. Although there are definite plans to expand the accommodation, this is an area requiring swift attention. The very high quality of care in the sixth form contributes to the development of self-assured and articulate young women. One student expressed the views of many in the comment, 'we are encouraged to become respectful, open minded and tolerant.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the achievement of students with learning difficulties so that it matches the outstanding level of progress made by the majority of students.
- Improve accommodation for sixth form students.

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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	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
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

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	1
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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	1	

The quality of provision

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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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	1	
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	

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

Inspection of Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College, Cheshire, CW11 3NT

On behalf of my colleague and myself, I would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for sharing your views with us when we came to inspect your school recently. I would like to share our main findings with you.

Your school was judged to be outstanding at the time of the previous inspection three years ago, and it is our view that the school continues to provide you with an outstanding quality of education. Many of the strengths have been successfully built upon, and this is shown in the school's examination results, which indicate an upward trend in standards over recent years. Standards at Sandbach, both in the main school and in the sixth form, are exceptionally high, and almost all of you make excellent progress during your time at the school. Most of the teaching at your school is at least good, and we saw some excellent lessons, especially in the sixth form. We were particularly impressed by the way that you are encouraged to develop skills to work independently, and also by the way in which your work is assessed, as you are fully involved in this. There are a small number of students who sometimes find the work quite challenging, and these girls make good, rather than outstanding progress. The school is beginning to successfully tackle this, but we have suggested that staff focus on improving the achievement of these students. You told us that you were very happy with the school's curriculum, and we agree that there are programmes of study and extra-curricular activities to suit every one of you.

The sixth form at Sandbach is outstanding, but some students and parents told us that the accommodation is a little too cramped now that the sixth form has expanded. We know that the school has plans to remedy this, and we have suggested that this is addressed as soon as possible.

Your school is extremely well led and managed. Your headteacher and all the staff are very committed to providing you with a very high standard of education. We are delighted that you are proud to be students at Sandbach High School and wish you every success in the future.