

Sandon Business & Enterprise School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124389
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	328126
Inspection dates	21–22 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Nada Trikić HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	780
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Barbara Hall
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2005
School address	Sandon Road Meir Stoke-on-Trent ST3 7DF
Telephone number	01782 312782
Fax number	01782 598197

Age group	11–16
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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

Sandon Business and Enterprise College serves a very diverse social and economic community. The proportion of students eligible for free schools meals is above the national average. Students come from predominantly White British backgrounds, with few from other ethnic groups. Some of these students are at an early stage in learning English. The number with a statement of special education need is average, although the overall number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school achieved specialist status for business and enterprise in 2003. It holds the European Eco Award, International School Award, the Information Advice and Guidance Award and a regional Health Promoting Schools Award. Over recent years, the college has experienced significant disruption because of a major building programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement. Sandon is a friendly college where a high priority is set for pastoral care, as demonstrated through good relationships and positive attitudes to learning. Leaders' emphasis on promoting good local, national and global links to broaden the horizons of students and the extensive range of enrichment activities contribute to good personal, moral, social, spiritual and cultural development. However, achievement and standards, and leadership and management are inadequate. Overall standards of attainment in both key stages have been below the national average between 2005 and 2007. Students make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 but by the end of Key Stage 4, progress slows and is inadequate overall. The provisional results of the 2008 GCSE examinations supplied by the school show some improvement; however, the percentage of students attaining five higher grade GCSE including English and mathematics remains below what is expected. Too few students make the expected progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, especially boys. Senior staff have not demonstrated the capacity to drive speedy and sustainable improvement. They have not focused sufficiently on strengthening teaching and learning since the previous inspection. The disruption arising from the school re-building project has added to the workload of senior staff and governors, and reduced their leadership capacity. This has been compounded further by staff absence. Management systems for checking the quality of work across the college are weak. They lack coherence and are not well co-ordinated. Targets set are not adequately challenging and consequently expectations are not high enough. Senior leaders have been too slow to establish a robust assessment and tracking system to identify effectively the students who fall behind. The college is now taking steps to improve this through closer tracking to identify underachievement, although this is not the case across all subjects. Teaching and learning are only satisfactory and inspectors identified inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, lesson planning and feedback to students. The use of assessment is too variable and opportunities are missed to strengthen students' knowledge, skills and understanding, to accelerate progress, and to promote independent learning. Recent initiatives to share good practice have been well received and leaders recognise that improvement can be accelerated through staff training, personalised coaching, and by rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning. Overall, care, guidance and support are satisfactory. There is good pastoral support and students speak positively about the care they receive. Academic guidance is less secure as marking and feedback do not consistently provide guidance on how to improve. The introduction of individual 'learning conversations' is providing an additional impetus to raising standards. The satisfactory curriculum is enhanced by business and enterprise, leading to strong work-related learning and participation in enterprise challenges and global projects, which students enjoy and gain in confidence. A wide range of intervention strategies and initiatives are used to support students in their learning, although there is insufficient emphasis on evaluation to identify the most successful approaches. Governors are passionate about the college's improvement and give generously of their time. However, they do not have access to key management information, in order to check progress against targets over the academic year.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rigour of self-evaluation at all levels of leadership, including governance, to enable the college to monitor its performance more accurately and to inform precise priorities and plans for improvement.
- Improve standards and achievement in English and mathematics, and the impact of cross-curricular literacy and numeracy through regular checks on progress.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through better use of assessment for learning approaches in order that students become independent learners.
- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning by middle and senior leaders to ensure rigorous evaluation and feedback to support improvement.
- Ensure that initiatives to improve students' progress are evaluated thoroughly so that impact can be securely measured.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students' progress is not checked routinely to support a timely response to tackle underperformance and to eliminate variation in outcomes for different groups of learners. In 2007, the proportion of students reaching the expected Level 5 was significantly below the national average in all core subjects. The gap has widened between the college's performance and that seen nationally. Students made satisfactory progress, an improvement on previous years particularly in English, resulting from external support focusing on assessment and intervention. The provisional results of the 2008 Key Stage 3 tests supplied by the school indicate that outcomes in mathematics and science are below the targets the school set for itself. In 2007, there was a significant dip in standards at the end of Key Stage 4. Low standards in English resulted from a high number of students not entered for the subject. A high failure rate in mathematics contributed to exceptionally low standards, with girls performing significantly less well than boys. The proportion of students gaining five or more higher grade GCSE passes dropped significantly, as did the proportion gaining a higher grade in both English and mathematics. Despite provisional GCSE results for 2008 showing an improvement, they remain below expectations. There is a mixed picture across courses and groups of learners. For example, GCSE outcomes in information and communication technology (ICT) are positive with all students securing an A*-C pass; however, outcomes in the other specialist subjects are mixed with less than half the students securing a higher grade in mathematics and less than one in four doing so in business studies. Assisted by local authority advisors staff are becoming more familiar with the use of assessment information; however, the use of such information to raise expectations remains inconsistent.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Links with schools in other countries help them develop cultural awareness, and students gain some knowledge of the cultural diversity of their region. Students have good awareness of workplace skills through the Young Enterprise scheme, work experience and contact with local employers. They use ICT effectively and work well independently when given the opportunity, but their progress over time in the key skills of literacy and numeracy is less good. Students have a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. They enjoy school meals and appreciate the imaginative scheme that rewards them for eating healthy foods. Participation in a good range of sports

activities helps them to adopt healthy lifestyles. Students enjoy learning when it is presented in a stimulating and challenging way, and collaborate willingly when asked to do so. They are enthusiastic about the range of activities on offer and their sense of involvement and ownership, particularly through roles as prefects, mentors and members of the school council. Students respond well to teaching about drugs, sexual education and physical health. They feel safe and say there is always someone to turn to. Behaviour in classrooms and around the college is good and students do much to ensure their peers respect and follow school rules. They are proud of their new buildings and treat them with care. The college has successfully developed a number of strategies to improve and maintain a good level of attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Most of the lessons seen during the inspection were satisfactory. A small number were outstanding, but equally a few were inadequate. Typically, teachers have a good rapport with students, which boosts their confidence and helps develop effective communication skills. Better teaching is characterised by lessons, which are well planned and engaging because learning activities are interesting. A recent college training programme highlighted good practice such as this and provided a helpful focus on improving teaching to ensure more of it is good in the future. The inconsistent use of assessment to plan lessons that are well matched to the needs of learners is hindering progress. Learners have too few opportunities to become independent learners and to assess their own learning. Therefore, they are unclear about how to improve their work. Classroom monitoring is developing, supplemented by 'drop-in' sessions. However, this is not yet having an overall impact on ensuring that more teaching is good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Business and enterprise status makes a beneficial contribution to the broad and balanced curriculum, with work-related learning in specialist subjects and business links in the community. Changes to the Year 7 curriculum are providing good opportunities for cross-curricular work. There are many other new or recent curriculum initiatives to promote learning but many staff do not tailor provision to meet the learning needs of different abilities and groups. Key skills are promoted but a cross-curricular approach to develop literacy, particularly writing skills and numeracy, is not securely in place. There is good provision of ICT in the new building. Students are positive about the many creative opportunities to use and develop their skills, such as video conference links with Australia and Ohio. Students' knowledge of health and well-being is good. Most students enjoy physical education, particularly the support received from staff and the variety of clubs that promote exercise. Educational visits and popular extra-curricular clubs and events enhance the curriculum. Progression routes are clear and well established and many students continue to further their education after leaving.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The college promotes personal development effectively, with plenty of opportunities for students to be involved as prefects, peer mentors and student representatives to the governing body. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the pastoral needs of students through vertical grouping

arrangements for Years 8 to 11. However, not enough is done to identify the needs of discrete groups of learners. The college has recently put in place a new approach to track the achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities but it is too early to judge the impact of this strategy. An audit conducted by the local authority found that many teachers were unaware of the strategies to support students with specific learning needs. The college has worked hard to reduce absence and has been successful in raising attendance to above the national average. Students are given appropriate guidance about option choices, careers and the range of courses available post-16. Suitable safeguarding and child protection policies are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Despite a period of disruption, leaders and managers have created a secure learning environment for students that helps to promote their self-esteem and aspirations and is supported by innovative global links. This has enabled students to develop confidence in different settings and to successfully experience diverse cultures. The college's business and enterprise status has been instrumental in forging good partnerships and successful community links. Leaders and managers have not taken sufficient action in recent years to improve standards and teaching. Senior staff have a broadly accurate view of strengths and areas requiring improvement but do not use data systematically to monitor and evaluate the work of the college. Priorities are identified but plans do not focus sharply on raising achievement and monitoring success. The local authority intervention review conducted in June 2008 also highlighted these weaknesses. Senior leaders recognise that systems for analysing assessment information need to be refined further to identify rates of progress for individuals and groups of learners. Additionally the role of middle leaders is inconsistent because clear guidance is not in place to support common approaches to monitoring and evaluating work across subjects. Core subject leaders of English, mathematics and science have benefited from a more collaborative approach through working with advisors, but this has not yet led to improved standards. Governors hold middle leaders to account for student and staff performance but they do not regularly check on progress. They recognise the need to review responsibilities across the governing body and leadership team given that there is now greater stability in staffing.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4

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	2
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	3

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

23 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Sandon Business and Enterprise College, Stoke-on Trent ST3 7DF

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your college recently. We were impressed with your behaviour and attitudes to learning and the way you all get along. You told us that you really appreciated the new school and open spaces which have helped to create a calmer atmosphere. The college is very successful in developing links around the world, which provide you with exciting opportunities to learn about other cultures. Business and enterprise status has helped to forge links with business and to ensure that the curriculum prepares you for the future.

At the end of our visit we decided that your college needed to improve in order to be more successful. We have asked college leaders to make improvements so that you make faster progress and achieve higher standards, especially in English and mathematics. We think your targets could be higher so you can be more successful. You enjoy many of your lessons but there are some that are not sufficiently challenging and do not meet your individual learning needs. You told us that you learn best when lessons are lively, when your understanding is checked and you are shown how to improve your work. We noticed that you also enjoyed opportunities to discuss your work. This gave you more confidence to tackle more difficult tasks. We have asked college leaders to check that lessons meet your needs and that you make good progress.

Governors work very closely with the college. We want them to be more involved in checking how well the college is doing so that any further improvements can be made to support your progress. A team of inspectors will visit regularly to check on the progress the college is making.

You, too, can help the college to improve further by thinking more about what you are learning in the classroom, and what you need to do to improve.

Our very best wishes for the future.

Nada Trikić

Her Majesty's Inspector