

Sandwell Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134993
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	334615
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Technical
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	0–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	881
Sixth form	337
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	11
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roy Harrison
Headteacher	Simon Topper
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Halfords Lane West Bromwich West Midlands B71 4LF
Telephone number	01215 251700
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Age group	0–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Sandwell Academy opened in September 2006 to provide education for children across the borough of Sandwell. In its first year it had students in Years 7 and 12 and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the nursery. Almost three out of five of its teachers are in their first three years of teaching.

The proportion of students who are entitled to a free school meal is in line with the national average, while the proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average. About one half of the students are from minority ethnic groups.

The academy's specialisms are business enterprise and sport.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The academy's overall effectiveness is good. It has some outstanding features. In the three years it has been open it has developed an outstanding curriculum as well as outstanding processes for the care, guidance and support of its students. Its capacity to improve is outstanding. The academy's popularity with parents is such that it is heavily oversubscribed for places in both Year 7 and the sixth form. Those parents who expressed a view to inspectors were generally very positive about the education their children receive. Several parents commented positively upon the strength of leadership in the academy.

Students make good progress in their work. They achieve standards which are above national averages, although they are broadly average when they join in Year 7. Students' personal development is good, students enjoy their time at the academy and say that they feel safe and know how to be safe. Behaviour in lessons is good and around the building it is exemplary. Students' understanding and adoption of healthy lifestyles are outstanding, as is their attendance. Their contribution to the community is good, for example through fundraising and playing an active role in such events as music concerts, some of which have involved invited guests from local care homes, and in house sports teams. Students also have a good range of opportunities to take on responsibilities, for example as house captains, student advisor groups on healthy eating and acting as student ambassadors. Students are outstandingly well prepared for their future because they reach above average standards in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). They participate exceptionally well in an outstanding range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities and this leads to a better understanding of the world of enterprise, work and the development of good leadership and team working skills. Students are very well informed about the management of personal finance, are knowledgeable about careers, and are highly adept at working both collaboratively and individually.

Students make good progress academically and in their personal development because of the outstanding nature of much of what the academy provides. The curriculum provides challenge for all, including the most able, by aiming to complete, in two years, work which in most schools is completed in three. The enrichment programme is very strong and attracts large numbers of students. The care, guidance and support that students receive are also outstanding. For example, the academy's assessment programme is very thorough and frequent, and there is very good follow up work done to ensure that those who are falling behind receive the support they need. While the quality of teaching is satisfactory, the amount of teaching time which students receive is considerably higher than in the great majority of schools.

The governing board is a powerful driving force. It is deeply involved in establishing the academy's ethos and in its strategic planning. Its members are very well informed about the progress being made on a wide variety of aspects of the work of the academy. It holds the academy's leaders strongly to account and, through visits, it plays an important part in identifying any areas which may require attention. The headteacher provides strong, highly committed leadership. The academy's specialisms play a very significant role in its success.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good quality of education. Standards and achievement are good overall and in applied GCE and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses they are outstanding. Student performances, as measured by average point scores, are above the national average. The personal development of students is outstanding. This is impressive because students join the academy from a large number of different schools. They are quickly inducted and become a harmonious group. The proportion that stays on from Year 12 into Year 13 is high and attendance is excellent. Students are excellent role models to younger pupils, not only because of their smart appearance but because they act as mentors and are active members of the mixed age tutor groups. The curriculum is good and offers a blend of vocational and academic courses. This is supplemented well with all students undertaking a course in ICT and general studies or personal development qualifications. All students undertake a three week work placement which they find beneficial and which is directly linked to future career plans. This is well organised through industrial consultants. Teaching is good with some areas of outstanding practice. Students show effective independent learning in and out of lessons. They raise some concerns about the lack of a common space for them to use and the lack of freedom during the timetabled school day. The quality of guidance about future careers is excellent, with over 70% of the academy's first group of sixth form students going onto higher education. The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. There is a rigorous process used to monitor students' progress against their targets. There are regular reports to parents reviewing students' progress in units or modules of work, these are detailed and very informative.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Babies and children achieve exceptionally well in the nursery. The strong emphasis on promoting their personal, social and emotional development helps them rapidly develop confidence and independence from early babyhood. They become adventurous toddlers and develop the necessary skills in readiness for school. Children's behaviour is outstanding because adults are excellent role models, guiding them when they make mistakes and praising them for their achievements. Parents are delighted with the nursery, saying that they 'could not imagine what they would do without it'. The partnership with parents is outstanding, particularly the daily sharing of information about children's achievements and the encouragement of parents to support their children's learning at home.

The exemplary quality of planning and assessments of children's learning and development are testimony to the manager's outstanding commitment to providing high quality early years provision. Learning journeys are effective tools for recording children's development across all the areas of learning. Information from these is used meticulously to track whether children are doing as well as they can and to plan the next steps for their learning. Indoor activities stimulate and excite children as well as helping them to develop good early literacy and numeracy skills. Children's learning and development indoors is outstanding. However, while staff make the best use they can of the available space outdoors, its location and quality limits children's full capacity for independent learning.

The care and attention given to children's welfare is outstanding. Staff are loving and caring and so children feel safe and are happy. The environment and resources are clean and well maintained, but there are insufficient hand basins for the numbers of children attending.

Leadership and management of the nursery are outstanding. The manager leads by example, building an effective staff team, implementing rigorous policies and procedures for the running of the nursery and constantly analysing its strengths and weaknesses in the drive to improve all aspects of the provision. There is outstanding capacity for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by greater sharing of good practice.
- Improve the outdoor accommodation for children in the nursery so that they can freely experience all the six areas of learning in an environment which fully meets their needs.
- In order to fully meet the specific requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the registered must: ensure that there is one hand basin for every ten children over the age of two.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The academy did not publish GCSE results in 2008 as there were no Year 11 students. Key Stage 3 is a two-year process and the governing body has set senior managers the task of securing the outcomes expected for students aged 14 one year early.

In 2008, all Year 8 students took the Key Stage 3 national tests and the proportion of students who achieved the level expected for their age was 10% above the national average in English and science. However, outcomes in mathematics were 21% above the national figure. Similarly, the proportion of students securing the higher Level 6 outcomes was just above the national data for English and science and well above the levels expected for Year 8 students in mathematics. This positive picture has been maintained in 2009 outcomes. Mathematics has maintained a strong position and standards in English and science show further improvement. In both the 2008 and 2009 examinations, girls performed better than the boys in all three core subjects. Students from an Asian Indian ethnic background were the most successful group, outperforming their White British peers. The performance of students from Bengali and African Caribbean backgrounds was in line with the national data.

Those students with some form of learning difficulty and/or disability performed at least as well as their peers and the performance of looked after children was outstanding in terms of the national data.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students develop very well both morally, socially, spiritually and culturally. There is high participation in sporting activities together with three to four hours of timetabled physical education, reflecting the academy's specialism in this area. This, in conjunction with students' very good knowledge about diet, drugs and sexual relationships, contributes very well to their outstanding understanding of healthy lifestyles. Students feel safe and acknowledge that there is very little bullying and that if it does arise it is quickly dealt with. Students enjoy their education. This is reflected in outstanding attendance and the number who take part in extra-curricular activities. Behaviour is good, although there is some low level disruption in a

small minority of lessons. While the school endeavours to collect the views of students in many ways, such as the popular headteacher's lunch and the use of suggestion boxes, students still feel more could be done to establish their views. Preparation for students' future economic well-being is outstanding, in part because of the influence of the academy's business enterprise specialism.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning, while satisfactory overall, has some outstanding practice. Teachers know their subjects well. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of appropriate teaching methods and good support received from teaching assistants.

There is good use of ICT as a teaching aid to add variety and interest to lessons. In the best lessons, students take part in collaborative work that allows them to explore and discover new ideas. Students are aware of what level they have reached and what they need to do to improve, but sometimes do not know how to make the improvements. In the less effective lessons, pace is not maintained, work is not closely enough matched to students' abilities, and more able students are not always sufficiently challenged by the depth of questioning to explore their understanding of conceptual learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is a real strength of the academy because it is so closely matched to the abilities, aspirations and interests of students. Considerable challenge is provided by the Key Stage 3 curriculum being covered in two years. This allows students to start on their Key Stage 4 courses in Year 9. Further challenge is provided by all students taking a qualification in ICT at the end of Year 9. Courses for Key Stage 4 provide well for those who prefer a vocational approach. Students speak very highly of the options open to them. Collaboration with the local football club creates exceptional opportunities for mentoring and coaching support. The academy's specialist business and enterprise status, along with its sports specialism, has a strong influence across the curriculum with students working on a range of enterprise schemes and sporting qualifications. It also contributes well to a wide range of community activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The academy is a very caring community that takes the welfare, health and safety of its students very seriously. Staff show a high level of commitment to supporting students, who in turn are considerate of their peers. Staff vetting is both thorough and robust and meets current government requirements. Staff know the child protection and health and safety procedures well.

The academy works very well with parents and with an extensive range of outside agencies. There is a firm commitment to treating and caring for every student as an individual. The academy's pastoral system functions very effectively and the wide range of inclusion support is well integrated with the pastoral system. Behaviour support systems are robust and effective.

Learners at risk are identified promptly and there is an extensive range of effective support arrangements in place. Students say that problems are dealt with swiftly and in a very understanding way and they know who to turn to if they have a concern. The support provided for those students in care and those with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding with all staff from personal tutor to key specialist focused on enhancing student access and progress. The impact of other agencies and professionals is good and those receiving this additional level of support progress well.

A robust assessment database is used very effectively to monitor student performance. Target setting is also robust and managed effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

There is a very strong commitment from the school's leaders to developing a very high quality of education for students. Leaders are strongly held to account. The governing board is exceptionally well informed and provides powerful leadership. The academy has effectively judged the necessity to develop more formal systems of monitoring and evaluation as its size and complexity increases and these changes are underway. The academy's evaluation processes are good. Subject leaders are well aware of the areas which require further development. For example, in the mathematics and science department analyses are carried out of the areas of work which present most difficulty to students so that improvements can be made in how these areas are taught. Subject leaders receive good levels of support and challenge from their managers.

The academy's contribution to community cohesion is good. Its leaders have a good understanding of the characteristics of the communities it serves. There is good education about the nature of multi-ethnic Britain and students from different backgrounds relate well to each other.

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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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
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?	2	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

12 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Sandwell Academy, Sandwell B71 4LG

Thank you very much for your help when we inspected your academy. We spoke with a lot of you, in meetings and in lessons, and found you to be confident, friendly and helpful.

We were impressed by many aspects of the academy's work, which is good overall. We found that your personal development is good, that you enjoy what the academy offers, your attendance is excellent as is the way you are helped to prepare for your future life, your behaviour is good too and you feel safe. We were particularly impressed by the curriculum, which offers such a wide range of extra-curricular activities as well as challenging you to complete your Key Stage 3 courses in two years. This is successful partly because of the outstanding support and guidance you receive. This is combined very effectively with an excellent assessment system. If you are not doing as well as you should be in your work, this is identified quickly and you are helped to improve. As a result you reach above average standards in your work.

The success of your academy is much to do with the work of the governing board and the senior leaders, who all have a very strong commitment to ensuring you do as well as you should. The provision for very young children in the nursery and Reception is also good. We have suggested a couple of improvements for the Nursery which are needed, to do with better outdoor education and more wash basins. For the academy itself we are suggesting that more work is done to ensure that all lessons are good or better.

Best wishes for your future.

Yours faithfully

Alan Alder Her Majesty's Inspector