

Sponne School

Brackley Road, Towcester, NN12 6DJ

Inspection dates 2–3 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Achievement is outstanding. Students consistently make better than expected progress and the attainment of all students is rising.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding and has shown rapid improvement. Lessons are engaging, varied and fun.
- Students make good progress in lessons because they are fully involved in their own learning through group work, with ample opportunities to discuss issues with each other.
- While teaching and achievement are outstanding, there are occasions when the presentation of students' work lacks care and this is not always corrected by teachers.
- Students' behaviour is good. They are courteous to each other and to adults. However, behaviour is not yet outstanding because students still need occasional reminders from adults on how to behave.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students are true role models for the younger ones in the academy. They make outstanding progress from their starting points on entry to the sixth form and attain highly.
- Led by its inspirational headteacher, leadership and management at all levels, including governance are outstanding. Throughout the academy there is a sense of shared responsibility and commitment.
- Leaders have successfully improved teaching rapidly and have ensured that students receive first-rate experiences to prepare them for life beyond the academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 51 lessons taught by 50 teachers. Five lessons were jointly observed with senior school leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to members of the governing body, staff and students from the school.
- A range of documents was scrutinised, including information relating to teachers' performance, minutes of governing body meetings, monitoring and evaluation records and the tracking of students' progress.
- Inspectors analysed the 123 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) completed by parents.

Inspection team

Robert Jones, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Robin Fugill	Additional Inspector
Sherry Gladwin	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth Needham	Additional Inspector
Anne White	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average secondary academy.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is below average, as is the proportion of students supported at school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs.
- A smaller proportion of students than average speaks English as an additional language or is from minority ethnic groups.
- Fewer students than average are known to be eligible for the pupil premium.
- The predecessor school converted to academy status in March 2011. It was judged to be a satisfactory school in its last inspection in January 2010.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' progress and attainment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure students always take a pride in their written work by presenting their work neatly and legibly at all times.
- Improve behaviour further so it becomes outstanding by helping students to always take responsibility for their own behaviour rather than occasionally relying on adults to remind them how to behave.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students consistently achieve well. Attainment is rising year on year, as are the rates of students' progress as they go through the school.
- Students' progress is outstanding in English and mathematics, and never less than good in other subjects. Those who join the academy with low, middle and high attainment consistently make better progress than expected nationally.
- Similarly, students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium make outstanding progress as a result of very detailed tracking of their progress by middle leaders.
- The relatively few students who speak English as an additional language or who are from minority ethnic groups make outstanding progress from their starting points.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including students who are supported at school action, school action plus or through a statement of special educational needs, make outstanding progress owing to the excellent subject knowledge of teachers, the very close support for their needs from teachers and teaching assistants, and a superb system of care and support for those who may need it.
- Students leave the academy with high levels of literacy. This is because the teaching of English is excellent right across the curriculum. Moreover, the well-stocked library with knowledgeable, dedicated staff encourages both boys and girls to engage well with literature.
- In lessons, students concentrate hard and apply themselves well to their work. In their eagerness to complete the work they occasionally rush, which results in some written work being presented untidily or their writing being sometimes difficult to read.
- Students in the sixth form make outstanding progress and their attainment is high. This enables all to progress to their chosen next stage of education or training.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers enthuse, engage and motivate students so that they are actively involved in their own learning through group work and discussions. This enables them to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding highly effectively.
- Many teachers set time aside in lessons so that students can reflect on how they learn best and discuss this with each other. These 'learning to learn' techniques help students to become highly reflective learners and are a significant contributor to their excellent progress.
- Students are questioned well in lessons and teachers expect them to answer in full sentences, which develops their reasoning skills. Teachers skilfully prompt students for fuller answers when necessary and encourage them to use a wider range of vocabulary when answering questions.
- Assessment information is used extremely well to customise learning to students' very precise needs. In one outstanding art lesson, for example, the teacher had written very detailed comments on students' progress with their coursework. She then asked them to read the

comments carefully and reflect on them and begin to apply what they had learned.

- Active participation in learning is continued into the sixth form, where the opportunities for collaborative learning are very much in evidence. In one highly effective lesson, students developed their understanding of complex philosophical issues such as Thomas Aquinas's view of univocal language, through thoughtful group presentations to other students.
- Such opportunities to discuss and debate issues have ensured that students develop good listening skills and the ability to appreciate each other's contributions to discussions. Inspectors were impressed with students' maturity when discussing issues such as bullying and how to stay safe online with them. This in turn has ensured that their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is excellent.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- In lessons, students apply themselves diligently to their work. On occasions, teachers have to remind students to refrain from chattering and refocus them on the work they are doing. However, once reminded of how to remain on task, all students are happy to comply with staff requests.
- Similarly, during lunchtimes and breaktimes there is occasionally boisterous behaviour in the playground and on the corridors, but students quickly fall into line when talked to by a member of staff.
- Overall, therefore, behaviour and safety are good but not yet outstanding because students have not yet fully acquired the skill of taking responsibility for their own behaviour without intervention from adults.
- The overwhelming majority of students feel safe from the threats of bullying or harassment. Moreover, they have a good understanding of the potential dangers of the internet and mobile devices through the work of anti-bullying mentors, who give presentations in assemblies and are on hand to give individual advice and support to students.
- Students are helped to understand and manage risks throughout the curriculum. For example, in a science lesson students were helped to understand how to use potentially dangerous apparatus safely.
- Sixth-form students act as excellent role models for their younger counterparts, by leading assemblies and being on hand to mentor and support students in Years 7 and 8.
- Attendance is above average. This reflects students' enjoyment of life in the academy.
- The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) are of the opinion that the school manages students' behaviour well.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Central to the academy's successes have been the rigorous monitoring and evaluation which are undertaken by all academy leaders and led by its visionary, energetic headteacher. As a result, academy leaders are well aware of its strengths and areas for development.
- In turn, all teachers are held closely to account for the progress of all students in their classes

and have been helped to improve their teaching through a well-structured programme of training and of sharing good and outstanding practice.

- The tracking of students' progress is innovative and of the highest quality. As students progress through the academy, any who fall behind are immediately identified and measures are put into place to remedy the situation without delay.
- This high-quality tracking of progress ensures no groups of students fall behind, therefore the academy promotes equal opportunities highly effectively.
- The rich curriculum on offer meets the needs of all students well. Provision for personal, social and health education is excellent, and delivered by a team of subject specialists. This ensures students receive accurate and up-to-date information on such topics as sex and relationships and careers.
- The arts, and particularly music, have a high profile in the academy. Many students are proficient instrumentalists or singers and are given excellent opportunities to take part in overseas tours and national festivals. These opportunities increase students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness significantly.
- The leadership of the sixth form is outstanding. Very regular reviews of students' progress are undertaken and whenever necessary, students receive counselling, support or advice. This has ensured virtually all students complete the courses they began at the beginning of the year, and that all students progress to their chosen university or career path.
- Safeguarding is afforded the highest priority and the academy meets all current safeguarding requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - provides an impressive level of support and challenge to the academy, with significant ambition to spread good practice to other schools
 - ensures the performance management of the headteacher and of staff is rigorous and firmly rooted in raising achievement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136488
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	402741

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1273
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Watt
Headteacher	Jamie Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01327 350284
Fax number	01327 359061
Email address	info@sponne.org.uk

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