

Samuel Whitbread Academy

Shefford Road, Clifton, Shefford, SG17 5QS

Inspection dates

2–3 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Plans to accelerate students' progress from the start of Year 9, by working with middle schools, are not yet resulting in enough teaching that builds quickly on students' achievements.
- Although examination results have improved year on year, the proportion of students attaining the highest GCSE grades should be higher still in relation to their above average attainment when tested in middle school.
- Students' consistently good achievement in English and more recently mathematics, is not matched by good or better progress in some of their other subjects, particularly modern languages and history.
- Despite very responsible behaviour around the school and high levels of involvement where teaching inspires, some lessons do not capture the interest of all students or do not do enough to develop their initiative and independence.
- Some important initiatives led by senior staff and middle leaders are inconsistently applied in the classroom, or are at an early stage of implementation, for example using assessment information to help plan lessons.
- Leaders are aware of teachers' professional development needs because monitoring of teaching is systematic and evaluation of learning is accurate. However, sharing best practice between subjects is underdeveloped.

The school has the following strengths

- Attainment is rising because the proportion of good or outstanding teaching is increasing. This is supported by effective use of performance management to help make improvements. The governing body set a good example of challenge and support.
- The curriculum and enrichment opportunities promote creative, cultural and physical development particularly well. The arts, sport and technology are popular because students' enjoyment contributes to high achievement.
- Students feel safe, supported and look forward to school. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now above average. Students rate 'student services' highly and feel reassured by the school's work to eradicate any discrimination or bullying.
- The sixth form is good. Almost all students progress into higher education, employment or training. Sixth formers make a very positive contribution to the strong sense of community that is valued by students and staff alike.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 48 lessons, of which 10 were joint observations with senior and middle leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and to the specialist centre for students with autistic spectrum disorder in order to sample the quality of teaching provided for students with special educational needs.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, five groups of students, a group of parents and the Chair of the Bedfordshire East Multi-Academy Trust. Groups of sixth-form students also organised visits for inspectors to social areas and enrichment sessions after school.
- Inspectors took account of 81 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) received during the inspection and several letters received from parents. The results of 70 questionnaires completed by school staff were also analysed.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work, scrutinised the school’s current data about students’ achievement, examined records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school’s work.

Inspection team

Ian Middleton, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

June Cannie

Additional Inspector

Catherine Moore

Additional Inspector

Michael Merva

Additional Inspector

Cheryl Jackson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Samuel Whitbread Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school and includes a large sixth form.
- The school is a converter academy, established in April 2012 from Samuel Whitbread Community College, a maintained upper school in the control of Central Bedfordshire local authority.
- The school works in partnership with local lower and middle schools as part of the Bedfordshire East Multi-Academy Trust (BEMAT) and Bedfordshire East Schools Trust (BEST)
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below that found nationally, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is below that found nationally. A below average proportion of students are supported through school action, school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs.
- There are 12 students supported by the school's specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs. This supports students with autistic spectrum disorder.
- The number of students who join or leave the school other than at usual transfer times is lower than in most secondary schools.
- The school has specialist status in engineering.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is at least consistently good by:
 - using assessment information to plan learning that meets the needs of all students and stretches the more able students right from the start of Year 9
 - using questioning more effectively to challenge students, deepen their understanding and inform planning
 - providing regular opportunities for students' active involvement and independence in learning.
- Improve achievement by:
 - raising attainment, particularly in modern languages and history
 - sustaining recent improvements in mathematics
 - increasing the proportion of students attaining A*-A GCSE grades.
- Ensure that behaviour is consistently good or outstanding by:
 - promoting positive attitudes to learning in all lessons, including responsibility and resilience.
- Strengthen the impact of leaders and managers at all levels by:
 - using professional development more effectively between subjects and across phases
 - engaging more parents and students in regularly evaluating the work of the school
 - ensuring that whole-school initiatives are embedded consistently well in the classroom.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the school in Year 9 having attained above-average standards when tested in middle school. The proportion attaining five or more GCSE A*-C grades including English and mathematics at the end of Year 11 is also above average. Standards of attainment have continued to rise year on year since 2009. However, achievement requires improvement because students have not attained enough higher grades over the past three years. The proportion of A*-A grades is below that found nationally in some subjects, including sciences, history, religious education and modern languages.
- Achievement in English is consistently good or better. Boys and girls make or exceed the progress expected. Until 2012 far fewer students made or exceeded the progress expected in mathematics; in 2011, 44 of the students who attained a C grade at GCSE were expected to attain a higher grade, based on their test results at the end of Key Stage 2. Provisional results in mathematics show a rise from 67% of students securing A*-C grades in 2011 to 73% in 2012.
- Disabled students and students with special educational needs progress at a rate at least equal to that of their peers where supported by specific programmes, individual education plans or curriculum options designed to meet their needs. This includes students supported by the specialist centre for students with autistic spectrum disorder. However, in lessons where the ability range is wide and activities remain the same for all students their progress slows.
- Students supported by the pupil premium make progress equal to that of their peers through intervention work well focused on addressing weaknesses in literacy. Students known to be eligible for free school meals performed as well as their peers in mathematics in 2012, an improvement on 2011.
- Students typically read, write and speak with confidence. Their enjoyment of curriculum and enrichment activities that promote their creative, cultural and physical development is common. Students progress well on vocationally-related courses.
- In addition to English, students' strong and sustained performance in GCSE art and design, computer studies, communication studies, drama, physical education, health and social care, shows what is possible. However, students' progress is uneven within and between subjects, reflected in results in business studies, German, Spanish, history and religious education that are below expectations.
- Stronger teaching in the sixth form, students' commitment to their continuing education and their increased initiative and independence, promotes good achievement at A-level. A below average proportion of students start the sixth form having attained A*-B GCSE grades and a high proportion progress to higher education.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because there is too much inconsistency, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4. Not enough teaching is focused on promoting good or better progress from middle school into Year 9, or ensuring that students progress equally well across their different subjects.
- Students benefit from some good and outstanding teaching that captures their interest,

challenges their thinking and accelerates their progress. These lessons are enthusiastically taught and well presented, often using computer technology effectively.

- In the best lessons, teachers use assessment information to design activities suited to students' differing needs. These include: paired and group activities for those at similar stages in their learning; investigative tasks pitched at varying levels of difficulty; and material presented with students' interests in mind. However, not all staff use the plentiful assessment information available, including that identifying students' strengths in other subjects.
- In a music lesson observed the teacher successfully used a lesson with a Year 9 group new to the school, to assess and address their needs. Students used mini-whiteboards to show their understanding of key words, information the teacher immediately used to organise the next stage of the lesson. Through open-ended questioning the teacher quickly gathered students' ideas about how to use the range of drums available to make music out of their word meanings. The teachers' skilled improvisation and intervention enabled all students to progress well.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge, but its use varies widely. In several lessons staff were too eager to provide answers before probing students' understanding. Support staff sometimes do too much of students' work for them. The better balance between teachers' exposition and students' enquiry seen in sixth form teaching should start earlier.
- Feedback to students is inconsistent. In art and design and technology lessons observed students valued critical feedback from the teacher about their work, particularly when shown different examples of other students' work, a strategy underused in other subjects. There are good examples of marking in English that highlight strengths and ways of improving work. However, targets for improvement are not given, or actions checked, in all subjects. Assessment is used effectively in the sixth form, for example in sociology and psychology.
- The promotion of reading, writing, speaking and communication skills across the curriculum is at an early stage of implementation. At best, teaching assistants and teachers work collaboratively to ensure that students who find these aspects of learning difficult receive good individual support. However, although lesson plans routinely identify students with disabilities or special educational needs, the strategies to address them are not always evident. Gifted and talented students are not always identified at all which represents a missed opportunity to refine and apply their skills.
- Overall, staff and students are mutually respectful and lessons are good humoured. Teachers' efforts to prepare displays, create resources and manage practical activities are rewarded by students' curiosity and participation. However, where lessons fail to engage the interest of all students a small minority interrupt the learning of others.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Most students are keen to learn and arrive punctually to school and lessons. Relationships between students and with staff contribute to an inclusive community ethos. However, behaviour requires improvement because when teaching is not engaging students' attitudes do not always focus on learning. While most parents, staff and students thought students behave well, some concerns about inconsiderate behaviour in lessons were expressed.
- Students are welcoming to visitors and to staff and students who are new to the school. Students take their roles and responsibilities seriously, which contributes to students, including those whose circumstances might make them feel vulnerable, feeling safe and supported. Disabled students and those with special educational needs, including those supported by the

specialist centre, integrate successfully in lessons where additional support is provided. However, students with behavioural, social or emotional needs do not always maintain positive attitudes to learning when the teaching takes insufficient account of their individual needs and interests.

- The conduct of students around the school site is harmonious, which militates against discrimination through sexist, racist or homophobic language. Students interviewed expressed strong moral values and confidence in the school's systems to address harassment or inequality. Students understand the damaging impact of different forms of bullying and are well aware of e-safety issues. Assemblies are used effectively to promote students' personal well-being.
- Following concerted efforts to address persistent absence, students' attendance has improved. Attendance in 2012 compared favourably with figures for schools nationally in previous years and the gap is closing with attendance in similar schools. The proportion of students excluded from school has also fallen. Different groups of students are well represented at the voluntary enrichment activities that are offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week. The new intake of Year 9 students showed a thirst for even more.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The school is efficiently managed and well resourced. Senior leaders and the governing body are proud of, but not complacent about, the school's achievements. Ambitious partnership plans are clearly focused on maximising students' opportunities as they progress through their education. However, leadership and management require improvement because although the school is continuously improving, pace is slowed by the inconsistent impact of initiatives in the classroom.
- The school has demonstrated that it has the drive and capacity to improve because the issues raised at the last inspection have been addressed effectively, including actions to address underperformance. Attainment and attendance have improved; planning is more sharply focused on outcomes that are measurable; more good and outstanding teaching is emerging. The school's priorities for further improvement are the right ones.
- Self-evaluation is well-informed by a systematic programme of monitoring. Effective actions to deal with relative weaknesses were demonstrated through improved provision in mathematics that led to a significant rise in results in the last year. Other subjects performing inconsistently are starting to benefit from new subject leaders and/or professional development focused on sharing best practice within subjects. Professional development between teachers working in different subjects or phases of education is not yet explored to the full.
- The 'student voice' informs the direction of leadership initiatives and contributes to the pride and ownership shown by students, particularly sixth-formers, in school. However, senior leaders are aware that opportunities for students and parents to get more involved in evaluating the school's work could be wider and more frequent. Communications with home are sometimes exemplary, borne out by the appreciative comments made by parents who met with inspectors. Outdated information on the school website shows that some other aspects require improvement.
- The curriculum makes a positive contribution to students' achievement and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Widened opportunities in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form take account of students' needs, interests and aspirations well. Although at a stage of review and partial implementation, the Year 9 curriculum is starting to make more of the close links between the upper school and the middle and lower schools that serve the same students. However, not all subjects promote students' continuity and progression sufficiently well between Year 8 and 9.
- Leaders promote and pursue a vision of a well-rounded education for all students. Academic and

personal development focus the school's work. The balance is just right in subjects such as English, where the development of positive and proactive attitudes to learning underpins the track record of high achievement. The popularity of 'literacy club' and 'page eaters book club' are indicators of impact beyond the classroom. The imaginatively restructured leadership team make the school well-placed to make best practice more widespread.

- As the school is a converter academy it does not receive support from the local authority. However, leaders commission external support when and where needed. Collaboration within the multi-academy trust is starting to increase the range of local support. Although it is too early to evaluate widespread impact, recent improvements in mathematics demonstrate the benefits. The impact of additional funding provided by the 'pupil premium' is monitored.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- draws well on the expertise, knowledge and experience of individual governors when challenging leaders and managers about provision and performance
- is well informed about strengths and areas of the school requiring further improvement, which are the focus of meetings, analyses, and scrutiny by the governing body
- contributes to the strategic direction and management of the school, including the effective use of resources to ensure best value for money
- is rigorous in performance management, focusing strongly on outcomes for students before recommending pay awards
- ensures that all statutory requirements for safeguarding are met.

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	137948
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	402780

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1649
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	447
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clare Morris
Headteacher	Robert Robson (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01462 629900
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