

Stony Dean School

Orchard End Avenue, Amersham, HP7 9JW

Inspection dates 21–22 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
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

- A large number of teachers have left or joined the school recently and the quality of teaching is now too variable.
- Students do not make enough progress for achievement to be good because of weaknesses in teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Teachers sometimes talk to the whole class for too long. They do not always ensure that activities are matched well to individual students' needs or that students know how well they are learning and what to do next.
- Leaders and managers, including governors, have had an overgenerous view of how well students are learning over time. This is because leaders were not looking closely enough at students' progress across the school, in relation to national expectations.
- Subject leaders are not as involved as they need to be in examining how well different groups of students are progressing in their subject.
- When judging the quality of teaching senior leaders do not check carefully enough how well students learn or identify clearly what weaknesses need to be improved.

The school has the following strengths

- The sixth form is good. Teaching and learning are good in the post-16 provision and students achieve well.
- Staff manage students' behaviour well.
- Students make good progress throughout the school in communication and social skills.
- Procedures to ensure that students are safe are good.
- The creative and engaging curriculum in each key stage enables students to develop future life skills.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 22 lessons taught by 22 teachers. Two of the lessons were jointly observed with senior staff. In addition, the inspectors made a number of other short visits to lessons, three of which were observed jointly with the deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors, a representative of the local authority, and students.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work, and looked at a range of documents including those concerning safeguarding, data on students’ progress, records about behaviour and attendance, planning and monitoring documents and samples of students’ work.
- Inspectors took account of 30 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Staff views were considered through the responses to the 22 questionnaires completed at the time of the inspection and through meetings with teachers.

Inspection team

Sonja Joseph, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Ian Robert McAllister

Additional Inspector

Christine Pollitt

Additional Inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

- Stony Dean caters for students with a range of diverse special educational needs, including severe and mild or complex learning difficulties, mostly involving speech, language and communication needs. An increasing number are diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders or have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The majority of students are boys.
- The school holds specialist status for communication and interaction.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The majority of students are of White British origin. An above average proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and an above average number speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government funding) is above average.
- There has been a high turnover of staff since the last inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is good or better, particularly in Key Stage 3, by ensuring that:
 - information gained from checks on students' progress is used to plan work that is well matched to their individual abilities
 - teachers have clear targets for exactly what each student is to learn in each lesson, based on careful monitoring of previous lessons and the students' starting points
 - teachers do not spend too long talking to the whole class
 - questioning is used skilfully by all staff to check students' understanding and to inform their next steps in learning
 - staff check students' progress throughout lessons and adapt the work to ensure that the pace of learning does not slow down
 - students are aware of how well they are learning and what they need to do next to improve.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that all leaders, including governors:
 - use available national information to set ambitious, realistic targets for all students based on their starting points
 - regularly and rigorously track students' progress towards achieving these targets and, where progress is not rapid enough, reviewing the effectiveness of teaching, use of financial resources and support arrangements
 - have a more accurate view of how well all students are progressing compared with students from similar starting points nationally so that they are better placed to provide challenge and raise standards
 - ensure that the monitoring of teaching is fully focused on how well students achieve and rigorous enough to identify shortcomings and resolve them
 - support newly appointed senior leaders, as appropriate, to develop their skills for checking the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Although standards are rising by the end of Year 11 achievement is not yet good because not enough students consistently make good progress from their low starting points on entry. This is because, in too many individual lessons, students do not make sufficient progress in their learning, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Many students make less than good progress because teachers do not always pay enough attention to matching work to students' individual abilities; as a result, the work set for them is too hard or too easy. In these lessons, although students happily take part in a range of activities, it is not always clear that they know how well they are learning and what to do next.
- As they move up through the school students develop their skills in literacy and numeracy. However, their rates of progress vary and are not consistently good for all students.
- Students make most progress when they are set ambitious targets and when there is careful monitoring by, and help from, their teachers to make sure they are on-track to reach these goals.
- For those students in Key Stage 4, progress picks up because more of the teaching is good. Students make good progress in developing their confidence to take on the challenge of attending college or undertaking work experience. This includes those students on the autistic spectrum, who often find such social gatherings difficult to manage.
- Post-16 achievement is good. Students in the sixth form are benefiting from a revised curriculum and a wider range of qualifications since the last inspection. This is ensuring that they make good progress in their learning and all students achieve appropriately accredited qualifications. For example, an increasing number of students have achieved a pass in GCSE examinations from low starting points on entry.
- Students' progress in communication and social skills is good across all key stages. The school's communication team provides specialist teaching programmes and individual support to students that enable them to achieve well. For example, students learn to use symbols to help them to understand and plan their day and to help them make their needs known.
- The focus on developing literacy has been successful in improved students' reading skills, including for those who speak English as an additional language and those students in receipt of pupil premium funding. Current school data and checks on students' work indicate that progress for both of these groups of students is stronger than that of their classmates.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is improving but the pace of improvement has not been fast enough and too many lessons require improvement, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Typically, teaching requires improvement, especially in Key Stage 3, because:
 - teachers often speak to the whole class for too long, so students find it hard to concentrate and their progress is slowed
 - questioning is not always probing enough to reveal what students do and do not understand
 - all students do the same task, regardless of their ability
 - marking and other feedback are not detailed enough so that students do not always have a good enough understanding of how well they are learning and what they need to do to improve.
- Where teaching is good, teachers have a very clear understanding of what they want each student to learn and carefully match their work accordingly. Teachers closely check how well students are learning throughout the lesson and adapt tasks set, to each individual student, so that students make good progress. In addition, staff ask questions that help to find out exactly

what each student understands, so that they can provide further support if needed or can push them on when they are ready. This was illustrated in an effective English and communication lesson in Year 11. Questioning and follow-up work was carefully adjusted to each student's targets and promoted their understanding of others' feelings and emotions. This does not happen in enough lessons.

- There is some good use of highly personalised targets for students in lessons. These set out clearly and precisely exactly what students are expected to achieve in each lesson. However, this practice is not universal across the school.
- All adults use the school's specialist status for communication to help students become more confident learners, often promoting their inclusion in learning through the use of a wide range of resources, pictures, signs and verbal cues.
- Teaching and support for students with more complex special educational needs such as autistic spectrum disorder ensure that they make similar and sometimes better progress than other groups. This is because all staff work strongly as a team to implement strategies recommended on individual education plans.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well around the school, at playtimes and in lessons. They work well with others. For example, in physical education they learn how to follow rules, keep themselves safe and to work in teams.
- Behaviour is not yet outstanding because in those few lessons which are not so well planned to meet individual needs, students' attention wanders which slows the rate at which they learn.
- Students with challenging behaviours do not generally interrupt the learning of others, and the encouragement that the staff give them to participate in learning and to adopt socially acceptable standards are mostly successful. Teaching assistants contribute greatly to this, with skilful, firm, clear communication and a persistence that is prominent.
- Parents and carers indicate that they feel their children are safe and secure at all times and that any type of bullying is extremely rare; records show that any such instances are dealt with appropriately. This view is supported by the students themselves. Older students were able to explain to an inspector how they keep themselves safe while using computers.
- Staff devote a great deal of time to helping students to listen carefully to instructions and respond to the feelings of others, which promotes their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The determined actions of the headteacher and governors have resulted in a team of teachers that is clearly committed to move the school forward. The large turnover of staff, particularly in the last year, though, has meant that developments have not been as fast as the headteacher wanted. The school has tackled inadequate teaching vigorously and considerably reduced it. The proportion of good teaching is beginning to increase. These successes show the school's capacity to improve.
- The school's self-evaluation is too generous. There is good tracking of students' progress on an individual basis, which has ensured that all students have equality of opportunity and that there is no discrimination. However, the school is aware that it needs to make better use of its data to check that the different groups within the school are all making the progress they should in relation to national expectations, and that targets for students' learning are based on good achievement.
- Senior leaders regularly check the quality of teaching. However, there has not been enough focus on how well students of different abilities learn. This has meant that some weaknesses in

teaching have not been identified or resolved quickly enough.

- Subject leaders, many of whom are new to their role, have yet to be involved in closely checking the quality of teaching and learning in their subject areas and using this information to ensure that students make at least good progress.
- Performance management has been used to support teaching and new, more rigorous, systems ensure teachers' pay is linked securely to the effectiveness of their work.
- A wide range of training opportunities has enabled staff to develop their skills. This is very evident in the consistent quality of communication strategies used by staff.
- The curriculum is effective and prepares students effectively for the next stage in their education. It is suitably flexible so that the needs of individual students can be met and includes an important element of personal and social development. The post-16 curriculum provides a range of vocational experiences which results in students being well prepared for their choices after leaving school.
- The local authority has provided light touch support to the school, providing help as requested. However, the local authority recognises that the school now requires increased visits and advice to support its move to becoming good.
- The pupil premium has been used to fund additional staff to work on one-to-one programmes and group support in literacy and numeracy. However, no evaluation has taken place yet to see if the funding has made a difference to students' achievements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

The governing body brings a wide range of skills and experience and provides effective challenge for the school's improvement of students' behaviour, but does not hold the school sufficiently to account for students' progress and the standards they reach. Governors are aware that weaknesses in the school's data have meant that there has not been adequate information to fulfil this responsibility. Governors have ensured, more recently, that the way teachers' performance is checked is carefully linked to students' progress, so that pay awards are now more closely linked to improvements in students' achievement. They have been rigorous in their decisions about when to move teachers up the pay scale. Governors have ensured that procedures for safeguarding are effective and meet fully all requirements. The governing body manages the overall school budget well and is clear about the use of pupil premium funding but has not yet evaluated the effect it has had on students' progress.

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	110579
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	401132

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	163
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Hilary Horne
Headteacher	Mrs Pauline Dichler
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 December 2009
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