

Sittingbourne Community College

Swanstree Avenue, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 4NL

Inspection dates 17–18 December 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well and the progress of different groups of learners is improving rapidly.
- The quality of teaching is at least good and continuing to improve, with many examples of outstanding practice.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the school. Their conduct, manners and punctuality are good. Students are courteous to adults, welcoming to visitors and respectful of one another.
- Students say they feel safe at school and have a good understanding of how to stay safe.
- The headteacher has restructured the leadership team, significantly raised expectations and implemented new policies and procedures. This is substantially improving the quality of teaching and so raising students' achievement.
- The governing body has a good knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. The governors carefully check many aspects of the school's work and provide effective support and challenge in this respect.
- The sixth form is good. The implementation of the recent curriculum review is improving standards of learning for sixth formers.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The rate of progress is not consistently high across all subjects.
- Although attendance is improving, it is still below average for some groups of students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 56 lessons or part lessons, involving more than half of the teachers. A small number was observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, staff, including senior and other managers, members of the governing body, including the Chair, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work, including the provision it makes for disabled students and those with special educational needs. They also listened to students read.
- They looked at a number of documents including: information about safeguarding; the school’s own information on students’ current progress, and parents’ and carers’ views; its view of itself; and records of monitoring in relation to teaching, students’ behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors observed students’ workbooks in lessons as well as an appropriate selection made at random in order to help evaluate progress over time. A substantial number of exercise books from a range of teaching sets were tracked against students’ individual progress information.
- Inspectors took account of the 87 responses to the online Parent View survey and considered the 88 responses made by staff in the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Haydn Evans, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Richard Butler

Additional Inspector

Sue Cox

Additional Inspector

Michael Elson

Additional Inspector

Josephine Lewis

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than most secondary schools.
- A very small proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups represented are of Black African and Black Caribbean heritage.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for looked after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals) is above average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium is above average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Students are entered early for GCSE and A-level examinations when it is appropriate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement so that it is consistently good or better across all subject areas by:
 - maintaining the level of rigour of recently implemented procedures for checking students' progress.
- Improve rates of attendance still further by:
 - reducing the number of students who find it difficult to attend regularly by strengthening links with their parents and carers
 - building on practices established to ensure that attendance continues to rise.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of students is good

- Students join the school with significantly below average levels of attainment. They make good progress, so that by the end of Year 11 attainment is nearly average.
- Students' achievement is not yet outstanding because student progress in some key subjects is not sufficiently above average. This is partly because some students do not always fully engage in their learning.
- All students are encouraged to read as often as possible; for example, reading during tutor time has become common practice and is well supported by the new library.
- Those in Year 7 eligible for the catch-up premium receive targeted literacy support from mentors and tutors which enables them to achieve as well as their peers.
- The school's examination results have improved substantially. This is because of the raised expectations that senior leaders have of teaching and achievement. The school's more robust tracking of students' progress also picks up on underachievement more rapidly so that interventions can be swiftly targeted.
- Achievement in mathematics is significantly above average. The proportion of students making good progress in key subjects is also improving rapidly.
- Students are generally well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment, and the proportion of Year 11 who remain in education, training or work on leaving the school is above average.
- The rates of progress in Years 10 and 11 are increasing rapidly. These evaluations are based upon the tracking information on students' progress. The school's own information and written work confirm that students make good progress over time.
- The very small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those of Black African and Black Caribbean heritages, have not achieved well. However, the gap between their attainment and that of other students is narrowing. This is because the monitoring of students' progress is more rigorous, systems are more robust and the intervention more effective.
- The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is in line with other students in the school.
- A minority of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium have not achieved well in the past. In 2013, they achieved one third of a grade lower than the average for students nationally. However, by means of more targeted support, the school is successfully narrowing the gap between the achievement of these students and that of their peers.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Pass rates are improving and completion rates and retention rates are also more positive. Student progress is improving and this is supported by the regular review of subjects in the sixth form aimed at meeting students' needs and aspirations.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good, and improving. It is characterised by good questioning, good planning and differentiation, the effective assessment practices of teachers and their positive relationships with the students.
- Teachers make effective use of information systems in monitoring students' progress throughout all key stages. This helps to accelerate the pace of learning. Teachers reinforce this by consistently providing written feedback to students about the next steps in their learning.
- Technology is used well to enrich teachers' explanations and to support students' learning. For example, in mathematics lessons it helps to engage students and sustain their interest throughout the lesson by animating teachers' explanations and providing illustrations for a variety of topics. In one lesson, a powerpoint presentation of three-dimensional objects was used to demonstrate the reflection of symmetrical shapes. Students took turns to manipulate the

objects on the interactive whiteboard. This enhanced their engagement in their learning and enriched their understanding of symmetry.

- In the best lessons, teachers skilfully question and challenge students in order to elicit explanations that improve their learning and understanding.
- In a successful Year 10 science lesson, students were required to study mitosis and meiosis. They were encouraged to pronounce the key terms correctly by the teacher's highly effective use of humour and animation. The teacher skilfully drew together responses from the students. Consequently, they were quickly able to develop the correct pronunciation and a very good understanding of the concepts.
- Teaching is well planned and most, if not all, students' learning needs are accounted for.
- Teachers' expectations about students' progress are generally high, as illustrated by classroom discussions. Students are confident in holding a dialogue with their teachers. The effect is that in the best lessons observed, including key subjects such as English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science, the discussion helped to promote rapid progress in students' learning.
- In the best sixth form teaching observed, students made rapid progress based upon their careful reading and preparation. The relationship between teachers and students was constructive and levels of engagement were high.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students typically have good and, in some cases, exemplary attitudes to learning, including when they are working independently of their teachers. These attitudes make a significant contribution to their improving achievement.
- Students' behaviour in a range of teaching groups and settings is mostly good and often excellent. Their behaviour around the school is good. They are polite to adults, helpful to visitors and generally respectful of one another. There is a positive ethos in the school. Corridors and recreational areas are orderly, treated respectfully and free from overt supervision by senior leaders.
- The majority of parents, carers, staff and students comment very positively about both the behaviour and safety at the school.
- The enrichment programme, together with students' personal education, helps to promote equal opportunities and develop a cohesive community with tolerance toward others. The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Tutorials and assemblies and the many artefacts around the site are good examples of this.
- Students have a good understanding of bullying, including cyber bullying. Students say that any bullying or harassment is dealt with discreetly and effectively. There are very few incidents, but the school is pro-active in this respect.
- Students say they feel safe in school and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. This is demonstrated by their very high standards of behaviour around the site and in lessons. However, behaviour is not yet outstanding because there are occasions when students can become distracted from their learning. This arises when students' learning needs are not properly met.
- Students are punctual to school and to their lessons. However, their rates of attendance are below average and the proportion of students who find it difficult to attend school regularly is above average. The attendance of groups of students considered vulnerable and those who have special educational needs and disabilities is also below average. However, this has improved over the last academic year with more focused support. The school continues to prioritise attendance in the current academic year and has appointed an education welfare officer to improve attendance further.
- The good behaviour of the sixth form contributes to the positive ethos of the school. Sixth formers lead by example and are excellent role models to the younger students. For example, they share their experiences and offer advice and support to those who wish to stay on.

The leadership and management are good

- The new headteacher has a clear vision for the school and has shown a sense of urgency as well as excellent leadership qualities in implementing it. In this respect he is well supported by his colleagues. This is demonstrated by the recent review of the leadership structure and also in the way the school manages the performance of teachers. It is based upon accountability and relevant training and has had a positive effect on standards generally.
- The headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team, has very high expectations. Their approach to improving the achievement and personal development of all groups of students is resolute. This is illustrated by the school's success in substantially improving students' progress in mathematics over the past year, and more recently in English and science.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have been successful in raising standards of teaching by synchronising performance management with the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school and the salary progression of teachers, linked to students' progress.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural needs of students are extremely well met through lessons, other activities and particularly the extra curriculum programmes.
- The school's range of subjects is effective and regularly reviewed to meet the needs, as well as the interests, of all groups of students, including those in the sixth form.
- The school works well with parents and carers. In a very recent survey, coordinated by the school, involving over 300 parents, their support of the school is almost unanimous.
- Outcomes for students in the sixth form continue to improve owing to the improved teaching and the provision of a range of courses that are more relevant to the majority of students' needs.
- Senior leaders have ensured that all safeguarding procedures are securely in place, meet statutory requirements and are rigorously applied.
- The local authority provides light touch support for the school.
- **The governance of the school is effective:**
 - Governors have a clear vision of their strategic role in improving the school. They make effective use of progress information to check the impact of teaching on raising students' attainment, to see how it compares with schools nationally, and are able to hold the headteacher and senior leaders to account. They have received the relevant training to enable them to fulfil their statutory duties effectively, including those relating to safeguarding. They make sure that financial resources such as the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding are managed properly. Governors have a good understanding of how teachers' performance is managed and make sure that pay progression takes account of teachers' individual achievements in relation to their targets. They know the strengths and areas of weakness in teaching, partly through their conversations with the headteacher but also through their close links with the work of the school. They know what the school is doing to tackle any underperformance. They are strongly supportive of the school's strategy for narrowing the attainment gap between different groups of students. Governors are aware of how the school uses the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding to improve eligible students' progress. They are able to challenge senior leaders through the committee meetings that take place each term and also the regular visits of governors to the school.

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	137687
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	399885

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

Type of school	Non-selective
School category	Sponsored Academy
Age range of students	11–18
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	1330
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Fassenfelt
Headteacher	J Whitcombe
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01795 472449
Email address	jwh@westlands.kent.sch.uk

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