

Sandymoor

Otterburn Street, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 1XU

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

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	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The quality of teaching is good overall and some is outstanding, leading to students making good or better progress in the large majority of lessons.
- The majority of students are meeting or exceeding the ambitious targets set by their teachers in mathematics, English and science.
- Students with specific needs achieve well overall because they are supported by highly effective teaching assistants.
- The senior leaders' and governors' vision for success, combined with their hard work and determination, is having a positive impact in all areas of the school's work.
- Students have a very good attitude to learning; they are enthusiastic and make the most of their experiences in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. This contributes to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Behaviour in all areas of the school is very impressive. Students are polite, friendly and supportive of each other's learning. Students feel safe and secure in school.
- Attendance is above the national average for all groups of students and few have experienced exclusion from this school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough of the teaching is yet outstanding.
- In science, some students who have special educational needs are not achieving as well as they could.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 part lessons including two joint observations with a member of the school's senior team. All teachers in the school were observed at least twice.
- Inspectors held meetings with approximately one quarter of the students in the school.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, members of the governing body, a group of parents, teachers and other school staff. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Inspectors took account of the 31 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and the 13 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including governing body reports, the school's self-evaluation, safeguarding and child protection records, and data relating to students' achievement.

Inspection team

Janet Palmer, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Timothy Gartside

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Three years ago a proposal to open a Free School was made by a group of five parents of primary- aged pupils looking to extend the provision for secondary education for the local, growing population of Sandymoor. The chief aim of the founders was to build an inclusive, small school that served families from across the socio-economic range. The Principal was appointed in March 2012 and Sandymoor opened in September 2012 with 19 students in Years 7 and 8 and five teachers.
- The school now has 104 students in Years 7, 8 and 9 (which the school calls Foundation 1 and 2 because not all students are placed in year groups according to their chronological age). Sandymoor is, therefore, much smaller than most secondary schools with plans to offer 11 to 18 years provision for up to 900 students over the coming years.
- Lessons are currently taking place in temporary accommodation. The new school building is due to open in September 2014 and will offer space for both school and community activities.
- The proportion of students that the school has identified as disabled or having special educational needs, therefore, requiring extra support through 'school action' or 'school action plus' is higher than the national average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational need.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is also above the national average.¹
- Most students are of White British heritage.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding by planning lessons so that students are stretched and challenged whatever their ability level.
- Improve the progress in science of students with special educational needs by ensuring questioning is at the appropriate level and tasks are neither too easy nor too difficult.

¹ The pupil premium is specific, additional funding provided to support the education of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years, children who have been looked after continuously for a period of six months and children whose parents are currently serving in the armed forces.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- School data and observations of teaching and learning in lessons indicate that students in both Foundation 1 and Foundation 2 are making at least good progress overall and performing above national expectations.
- In Foundation 1, the great majority are meeting or exceeding their targets in English, mathematics and science.
- In Foundation 2, the great majority are meeting or exceeding their targets in English and mathematics, but fewer are doing so in science.
- Students who are eligible for the pupil premium achieve better than their peers in English but achieve a little less well than their peers in mathematics and science, although they are still achieving above the national average for this group.
- Students known to be eligible for free school meals achieve less well than their peers in English and mathematics but achieve in-line with their peers in science and above the national average for this group nationally.
- The funding for students eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium² is having a positive impact on their progress in literacy and numeracy. Targeted help from well- trained teaching assistants means that these students are on track to achieve level 4 by the end of the academic year.
- Students identified as disabled or having special educational needs make similar levels of good progress as their peers in English and mathematics, but make less progress than their peers in science.
- Girls outperform boys in English, and boys outperform girls in mathematics. Boys and girls perform similarly well in science although a greater proportion of boys than girls exceed their targets in science.
- Students who joined the school with high levels of attainment are making particularly good progress in mathematics.
- Observations of learning indicate that the great majority of students achieve well across the range of subjects. Apart from in English, mathematics and science, students were also observed making good progress in drama; religion, philosophy and ethics; computing; humanities and in personal, social, health and economic education.
- Literacy has a high profile at Sandymoor. Teachers encourage students to widen their vocabulary in lessons; attention is paid to spelling, punctuation and grammar and students are encouraged to read in form time. Consequently, literacy levels are improving across the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- A large majority of the teaching is good or better. In all lessons, students have good relationships with their teachers and with each other. This usually leads to students actively supporting each other's learning and striving to meet their teachers' high expectations.
- The good and outstanding teaching is characterised by meticulous planning to ensure that all students are highly engaged and achieve their potential. For example, in a drama lesson the whole class remained enthusiastic and in role for over 30 minutes, after which they were able to explain in detail what they had learned and how they could improve their performance. In a mathematics lesson, the challenge of mixed -ability teaching was overcome by the teacher preparing high quality videos to support learning at different levels alongside targeted individual support from the teaching assistant.

² The Year 7 catch-up premium is for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in English at the end of Key Stage 2.

- The few lessons where teaching required improvement were characterised by the teacher not always ensuring, through effective questioning, that all of the class understood before moving on, and presenting work that was too difficult for some and too easy for others, leading to some low-level disruption.
- Students have many opportunities to develop their communication and study skills by working in pairs, in groups and independently. They demonstrate great enthusiasm for learning by asking as well as answering questions, listening intently when required, and seeking ways to extend their learning by attending clubs, such as cooking, science and sports.
- The marking of work in books is good. The great majority of teachers follow the school's policy on marking and feedback by addressing spelling, punctuation and grammar and ensuring students understand what they need to do to reach their targets and improve further.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well in lessons and around the school. They are friendly, courteous and respectful to staff and to each other.
- Students arrive at lessons ready to learn. They fully engage with learning, are enthusiastic, work extremely well together and demonstrate pride in their work.
- Attendance is above the national average and exclusions are rare. Effective systems are in place to support students with attendance problems and the highly valued rewards system promotes punctuality and good behaviour.
- The students who met with inspectors said that there were 'hardly any bullies' and that when bullying is reported to an adult it is very likely to stop. They said that racist language, attitudes or behaviour are not tolerated by staff or students, but that homophobic language was sometimes heard around the school, although not in classrooms because teachers would not allow it.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students had learned about e-safety and discussed how to keep themselves personally safe in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons. However, some aspects of this programme require further development to ensure that students are able to deal age appropriately with the risks they may face within and beyond school as they grow and develop.
- All parents who completed the Parent View questionnaire agreed that their child was happy and felt safe at school and a very large majority agreed that behaviour was well managed.
- Systems and procedures for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The outstanding leadership of the Principal, vice-principal and governing body is enabling the aims of the founders to '*...create, employable global citizens that demonstrate social competence, a desire for learning and respect for each other and the world around us*', to be realised.
- This ambitious vision is shared by all staff regardless of their role in the school. In response to a questionnaire completed by all teachers and support staff, all were proud to be part of the school community, all felt well supported in their own professional development, and all agreed that the school is well led and managed.
- The leadership has developed its own bespoke system for performance management that matches the school's philosophy for learning. It helps teachers set aspirational targets for their work within and beyond the classroom and supports them in achieving these through targeted professional training. The system is robust and ensures that pay awards are fair and deserved and that any underperformance is tackled quickly and effectively.

- The quality of teaching and the monitoring of students' progress is a key focus in the school's development plan. Teachers hone their skills by observing and discussing best practice in each other's lessons, and by visiting strong subject departments in other schools.
- The curriculum is particularly strong. The Foundation Curriculum covers all national curriculum subjects as well as religious education, PSHE and careers education. All students experience a minimum of two hours physical education, covering sports science and physical education related skills that are designed to enable them to take responsibility for their own physical well-being. Each student has a business and enterprise mentor to help raise their aspirations and develop their enterprise abilities.
- The Pathways Curriculum for students in Years 9, 10 and 11 has been developed in close consultation with students and their parents to ensure that it meets students' needs, interests and aspirations. The curriculum offer is innovative and includes a broad range of academic and vocational options including a wide range of science options, business and enterprise, creative media production, performing arts, and sports science.
- Students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced by the very many opportunities the school provides for them to engage in charitable, artistic, sporting and other activities. Monday afternoons are given over to 'community engagement' where students lead on a range of activities, including charity fund-raising and work in the school's own market garden. Participation in extra-curricular options and overseas trips is monitored and analysed to ensure all students are able to take full advantage of the wider curriculum. Some pupil premium funds are used to ensure that lack of finance is never a barrier to participation.
- Equalities are addressed in the formal and wider curriculum and prejudice-based bullying and derogatory language are tackled well. All equalities policies are up-to-date, are ratified by the governing body and fully meet the requirements of the 2010 equalities legislation.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - This school is governed by a highly competent, committed and engaged group of people who have been with the school since its outset in 2012. They bring a good range of experience and expertise to the management of the school, are extremely well informed about its day-to-day running, and have clear plans for its future as an integral part of the Sandymoor community.
 - The governors are very much part of the leadership team. They hold regular meetings with the Principal, attend and contribute to all senior leadership meetings, attend school events and training days and gather the views of students and parents through questionnaires. They understand how to interrogate achievement data, have a sound knowledge of the quality of teaching and know how to hold the leadership to account. They have an in-depth understanding of the school's finances, including the appropriate allocation of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding and they fully understand and fulfil their responsibilities with regard to keeping students safe.

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	138198
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	426040

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Free school
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Eastburn
Headteacher	Andrew Green-Howard
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01928 571217
Fax number	-
Email address	info@sandymoorschool.org.uk

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