

# Sir Graham Balfour High School

North Avenue, , Stafford, ST16 1NR

**Inspection dates** 8–9 May 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Achievement has risen strongly since the previous inspection. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average. Students greatly enjoy their learning and make good progress.
- Most teaching is now good with much that is outstanding. Students say lessons are fun and they value the way teachers give so much of their time to help and support them.
- Behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Students show great enthusiasm and are often totally engrossed in the tasks that are set for them.
- Behaviour around school is calm and orderly with students showing courtesy to each other and adults. They say that mixed-age tutor groups enable them to feel part of an extended family.
- Students say that they feel very safe and that they are well cared-for. They have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Procedures to tackle prejudice of any kind are extremely effective.
- The sixth form is good and improving. Sixth form leadership is outstanding and achievement is rising strongly.
- The headteacher is very well supported by his senior team. They are relentless in their drive to raise the quality of teaching and student progress and ensure the wellbeing of all.
- Leaders have secured improvement in all aspects of the school's work since the previous inspection and have a strong capacity to improve further.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teaching is consistently good. In some lessons, high attaining students are not sufficiently stretched. Progress is not as rapid in English as it is in mathematics.
- Teachers do not consistently ensure that students respond to the advice they are given on how to improve their work.
- Governors' procedures to seek the views of parents are not sufficiently systematic or rigorous.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 lessons, ten of which were seen together with one of the school's senior leaders. They also made a number of further short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with students, parents, governors, staff, and telephone conversation took place with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at policies, the school's own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and its development planning, governors' minutes, records of lesson observations, information about students' progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students' work.
- The views of the 54 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. Inspectors also took written communications from parents into account as well as the 31 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Kent

Additional Inspector

Helen Booth

Additional Inspector

Alan Brewerton

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is below average. Very few students speak English as an additional language.
- 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 below average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is average.
- Full-time off-site alternative courses provided by the Hollies are followed by six students.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The sixth form is part of the Stafford Collegiate consortium.
- The school works closely with other local schools, particularly Walton High School.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that all teaching is consistently at least good and move more to outstanding by ensuring that:
  - all teachers fully stretch and challenge those of the highest ability to ensure more of them make consistently rapid progress, particularly in English
  - teachers consistently ensure that students make the maximum use of advice in the written feedback from teachers on how to improve their work.
- Increase the rigour with which governors canvas the views of parents in order to fully engage them in their child's education.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with basic skills in reading, writing, communication and mathematics that vary year-on-year but are often below average. Standards by the end of Year 11 have been steadily rising and, in 2013 the proportion gaining 5 good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, was above average. Current assessments show that this is predicted to rise further by the end of the 2014, with a greatly increased proportion of students gaining the highest grades, as a result of leaders' focus on enabling high attaining students to reach their targets.
- The proportion of students making expected progress in English was in line with averages last year. Currently, an above average proportion is on track to make expected progress, and the proportion making even faster progress is also increasing. The proportion making expected progress in mathematics is above average. More-able students generally achieve well but do so more consistently in mathematics than in English.
- Leaders have taken firm action to address underachievement. This has resulted in a dramatic improvement in mathematics over recent years. Improvement is now also being seen in English, where recent curriculum changes in Key Stage 3 and good teaching, are now having an impact and raising achievement in this subject. This can be seen particularly in Year 10, although rates of progress lag a little behind in Year 11 because these students have not had the sustained benefit of the new curriculum.
- The school entered Year 10 students early for their mathematics GCSE in 2013, and in Year 11 they have the opportunity to improve their grade or to study for an additional qualification in statistics. From 2014, students are being entered only in Year 11 so that students' chances of achieving higher grades are not limited.
- Students enter the sixth form with attainment that is generally below that seen nationally, although all are required to have attained at least a grade C in English and mathematics. They make good progress and, in Year 12 are making outstanding progress. Assessments show that students are on line to meet and exceed their targets by the end of the year.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is equal to that of their peers. This is as a result of the good support they receive, which is well-coordinated across the school. There is no significant difference in achievement between students of different ethnic backgrounds or between the very few who speak English as an additional language and other students.
- The Year 7 'catch-up' funding is used appropriately to provide support for those students who join the school with low basic skills in numeracy and literacy. An 'immersion group' provides intensive support in Year 7. Further catch-up sessions are provided throughout Key Stage 3 and beyond, ensuring that students have the skills they need to succeed. During the inspection, students were observed supporting each other when reading out loud. The library is used well, and provides a light and comfortable area in which to enjoy reading.
- In 2013 there was a wide gap in achievement in English and mathematics between students for whom the school receives additional pupil premium funding and their classmates. Eligible students were 18 months behind in English and 16 months behind in mathematics. This was because nearly a quarter of this group of students in that year group faced extremely challenging circumstances, resulting in several being unable to sit their examinations. Current assessments show progress in English and mathematics is now improving rapidly; gaps in

attainment are closing dramatically and, by the end of 2015, are likely to be negligible.

- Students following alternative courses achieve well. Their progress and attendance are closely checked and all are well cared for and supported.

## The quality of teaching is good

- Lesson observations and evidence of pupils' performance seen during the inspection, including in the sixth form, confirmed leaders' judgement that almost all teaching is at least good, with much that is outstanding. However, a very small minority continues to require improvement.
- Students told inspectors how much they enjoy their learning because teachers make learning fun. For example, in a German lesson, students competed in pairs to see who could be the first to decipher phrases that included written numbers, and to record their results on the board. This resulted in excellent learning as students could see when others were beating them.
- Most teachers plan tasks that closely match their students' abilities and provide appropriate support and challenge. For example, in one English lesson, less-able students enjoyed planning a court scene and playing the role of characters from *'Macbeth'*. The students made outstanding progress over time as the teacher had ensured that they had previously built a thorough understanding of the characters in the play so that they were able to use quotations to illustrate their work. As a result, they were achieving beyond their targets.
- Teachers model good practice, using their good subject knowledge, for example, to demonstrate a technique in art or to ensure that words are pronounced correctly in language lessons. Questioning is used skilfully by most teachers, to encourage students to explain what they already know and to think deeply. Students are often provided with opportunities to reflect on or to discuss issues that affect them, promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are well supported in lessons. Teaching assistants are used effectively and have a good understanding of the subject so are able to provide expert support. Teachers provide encouragement to boost confidence and identify clearly the steps students need to take to improve their work. For example in a Year 11 English lesson, this strategy resulted in students being able to identify features such as 'alliteration' and 'imagery,' and to use these terms and other technical vocabulary with understanding.
- Students say that teachers consistently provide clear feedback on their work so that they know how to improve. Teachers make sure students know how to assess their own and other' work accurately so that they have a good understanding of how to achieve the highest grade or level. However, teachers do not always ensure students respond to the advice they are given when marking their books, by putting this advice into practice.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding because activities do not always fully extend those of highest ability or ensure that students make better than expected progress.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form matches that in the main school and is enabling students to make good progress and to develop study skills that prepare them well for further education or employment.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. They show a great enthusiasm for their learning and are keen to do well. As a result of the good teaching they receive and the consistently good management of behaviour by all staff, they show positive attitudes to learning. Staff and parents agree that students behave well.
- Students were observed during the inspection to be fully engrossed by the tasks set for them, sometimes concentrating so hard you could 'hear a pin drop'. This was particularly the case in a Year 7 art lesson observed, where students were learning the skill of observational drawing.
- Around the school the atmosphere is calm and orderly. Students are polite and courteous to adults and to each other. Students of different ages know each other well and support each other as a result of the mixed-age tutor groups. They are welcoming to visitors, and inspectors were very impressed by the mature way they expressed their views in discussions and how keen they were to explain how proud they are of what the school does to support them.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students are clear that bullying or racist incidents are not tolerated and that speedy intervention would take place should an incident occur. All staff are clear about their duty to meet the diverse needs of students and actively promote tolerance and inclusion regardless of disability, faith and sexuality. Students report that they feel able to be themselves.
- Attendance has steadily risen and is consistently above average. Exclusions are below average.
- Students told inspectors that they feel safe and that the school ensures their wellbeing, one student saying, 'The school wants us to be happy.' Procedures for promoting safety are seen as a model of good practice by the local authority and other agencies and the school shares this with other schools. Students and their families facing challenging circumstances are very well supported to enable them to reach their potential.
- The school is quick to identify students at risk of underachieving due to poor behaviour and to work to change their attitudes. For example a group of boys were given a special project to organise a school talent competition, including auditioning and selling tickets. The boys told inspectors how much this had boosted their confidence and how proud they were of their success.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is also outstanding, with students taking a leading role in school and community activities, for example by mentoring younger students. Sixth form attendance is also above average. They are good role models for students in the main school in their attitudes to study and in their behaviour and are excellent ambassadors for the school.

**The leadership and management are good**

- The headteacher has been relentless in his drive for improvement following the previous inspection. He has strengthened senior leadership by establishing two extremely effective complementary teams, focusing on progress and teaching and learning. These two groups work closely together to ensure that each individual student is able to achieve to their potential, that underachievement is quickly identified and that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- The school knows itself well and has clearly laid out areas for development addressing the issues

raised by the previous inspection systematically. All these have been fully addressed and all areas of the school's work have shown strong improvement.

- Procedures to promote good teaching are extremely thorough. Each faculty undergoes a review twice a year where each teacher is observed and held to account for the progress made by their students. Staff are keen to improve their practice and there is a wide range of training and support to enable all to do so, including supporting each other in 'coaching trios.' Staff expressed their positive views of this process, saying how much they enjoy working at the school.
- Subject and other middle leaders have a good understanding of their role and are driving improvements. For example, leaders identified that the Key Stage 3 curriculum in English was preventing students from developing their skills to the full. New leadership of the department has quickly addressed this and this has already had a strong impact on the rising achievement now seen in Year 10. The school works closely with another Stafford school to provide training to further build the capacity of middle leaders.
- The curriculum is well planned to match students' needs and interests. The promotion of literacy and numeracy is well planned across subjects, ensuring that students who entered the school with very low literacy skills have been well-supported by being taught in smaller groups. Alternative courses are provided for students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. A wealth of careers advice, both by the school and from independent sources, is provided and students acknowledge the quality of the advice they receive.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development very well. SMSC lessons are well-planned throughout the school, and students are able to discuss issues likely to affect them, including racial tolerance and homophobia. Students were keen to tell inspectors about their fundraising for the school they sponsor in Cambodia and the opportunities that sixth form students have to visit and take lessons.
- Leadership of the sixth form, including through the collegiate, is outstanding. Students' progress is carefully tracked so that students know where they are and what they need to do to improve. Under-performing students are mentored, support provided and targets set for improvement. Students say that they are very well prepared for employment and higher education. Regular speakers from industry, mock interviews, financial management and guidance on developing study skills, all enrich students' learning. A wide variety of courses are provided in partnership with the collegiate to match all students' interests.
- The local authority regularly reviews the effectiveness of its provision.
- The school provides strong support for families facing challenging circumstances and provides a wide variety of information, including through the website.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are committed to the school and support and challenge its leaders well. They make frequent visits and take an active part in faculty review and discussions about students' progress resulting from these. They have provided good support for the headteacher in strengthening the senior leadership team. Thorough checks take place until issues are satisfactorily resolved. They have a good understanding of the school's performance and how it compares to other schools and are actively involved in ensuring that good teaching is rewarded and any under-performance is tackled. They seek training and meet regularly with leadership of other local schools to share good practice. Their stated aim is that all students will achieve and be happy at the school. They ensure that safeguarding procedures are rigorous and meet current requirements. There is currently no formal process for governors

to canvas the views of parents to enable the school to respond to concerns or fully involve parents in their child's education.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	124444
<b>Local authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	431139

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	892
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	111
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Norman Cobon
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Wright
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 January 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01785 223490
<b>Fax number</b>	01785 250145
<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@sirgrahambalfour.staffs.sch.uk

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