

Samuel Whitbread Academy

Shefford Road, Clifton, Shefford, SG17 5QS

Inspection dates 15–16 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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.

- Achievement is good. Students make good progress as they move through the school. The proportions of students across all year groups making more than expected progress is rising steadily.
- Teaching is typically good with an increasing proportion of outstanding teaching. Leaders have had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching in all subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Students behave well in lessons and around the school. Inspectors agree with the parents' views that their children feel safe and that bullying is rare.
- School leaders are relentless in their ambition to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching further. They have made very good use of the support from the Bedfordshire East Multi-Academy Trust (BEMAT).
- The curriculum is well structured to meet students' needs and provides an extensive range of courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- The sixth form is good. It is led well and, as a result, students are making good progress and are very well prepared for the future.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not every student responds to the helpful marking provided by most teachers.
- Some low-attaining students are not always challenged as much as they could be.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 51 lessons or part lessons. Several observations were made alongside senior leaders. A check was also carried out on pupils' work in workbooks.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior team members, students, subject leaders, parents and five members of the governing body.
- Inspectors considered 135 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). They also took note of a letter and telephone conversations with parents and listened to the views of parents in an arranged meeting. Inspectors analysed the results from 74 staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors looked at the school's own data relating to students' current achievement, the school's own evaluation of its work, improvement plans, records on behaviour, safety, attendance, exclusions and safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed students read in class and talked to them about their reading.

Inspection team

Patricia Hunt, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Chris Ockendon	Additional Inspector
Heather Housden	Additional Inspector
Peter Thomas	Additional Inspector
Susan Bullen	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, which opened in March 2012. In October 2012 the academy was judged to require improvement.
- 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. (The pupil premium funding is funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those from service families and those who are looked after by the local authority).
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below that found nationally, as is the number of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportions of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is well below national. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement is also well below.
- 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 and leave the school at other than the usual times is well below national.
- A number of students attend alternative provision at Bedford College including Shuttleworth, an agricultural college.
- The school has specialist status in engineering.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the proportion of outstanding teaching so that all students, especially those of low ability make even more rapid progress across all subjects by:
 - making sure that all teachers fully stretch all students, especially those of lowest ability, so that work is at the right level of difficulty in order for them to achieve well
 - ensuring that every student responds to the helpful marking provided by most teachers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is improving. After a slight fall in 2012 there has been a strong focus on raising standards of teaching and learning. Typically attainment is above average and achievement is good. In 2013 the proportion of students securing five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and maths rose and school data indicates a further rise in 2014.
- There is a rapidly rising trend of improved achievement. Students usually enter the school in Year 9 with attainment above the national average. The achievement of current students in all years demonstrates at least good and in some cases rapid progress. The majority of students who completed Key Stage 4 in 2013 made progress broadly in line with national averages in making expected and better than expected progress in English and mathematics. However, progress in science, humanities and languages was weaker, particularly at the higher grades. Leaders have worked hard to address this and school data now shows that progress is much improved in these subjects.
- In 2013, the gap between the performance of those students eligible for pupil premium funding was larger than nationally found in English and mathematics. Too few of those students made the progress expected of them. The gap was at just over one grade lower for pupils eligible for additional funding than others in the year group in English and mathematics.
- School information shows that it now uses its pupil premium funding very effectively to support eligible students. The school has been successful in narrowing the attainment gap between those students eligible for pupil premium funding and their peers. It has provided support through one-to-one tuition, small group teaching and additional in class support. The school consulted with parents and students on how the funding could be spent most effectively.
- Achievement in a range of subjects, including science, geography, design and technology and French has improved over the last year and is now improving rapidly. Percentages of pupils in line to achieve the higher grades are also looking positive, except in a few subjects which have been targeted by the leaders.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress, as a result of the strong support they receive in lessons and in the resource unit. Students in the specialist resource unit enjoy their learning, attend regularly and achieve well.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Students in the sixth form are now making good progress and the vast majority are on track to reach their targets. This is because of strong leadership and the outstanding care, guidance and support students receive. The vast majority of students enter university when they leave.
- Assessment data presented by the school and lesson observations show that more-able students are now achieving high standards and making rapid progress in most subjects.
- The school has a flexible approach to early entry policy for some GCSE examinations that makes a positive contribution to students' motivation and achievement. The curriculum is well thought-out and meets students' needs and aspirations well.
- Students following vocational courses at the local colleges make good progress.

- In some lessons lower ability students do not make as much progress as their peers. This was usually because the work was not set at an appropriate level.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good with an increasing proportion of outstanding teaching. As a result, most students make good progress and achieve well. This was reflected in the learning observed particularly in English and mathematics, and in students' work.
- Leaders have supported teachers by focussing on areas, identified through performance management and the monitoring and tracking of teaching, which teachers needed to improve. The school has been innovative in instigating working groups that, for example, make sure lessons are engaging and challenging and will ensure good learning. This, and the sharing of best practice by the school's outstanding teachers, has resulted in more outstanding teaching.
- Teachers have high expectations of all groups of students, especially the most able. In the best lessons students were able to articulate arguments using a good range of technical language to further challenge their knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers relate well to students and establish a very positive learning climate. They know their students well and push them to achieve so that their attainment continues to rise.
- Students say that teaching is much better now than previously. A very large majority of parents who responded to Parent View share this view that their children are taught well.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to support students' learning. They provide additional support, particularly for those pupils integrated into lessons from the specialist resource provision.
- Students in the sixth form have very positive attitudes to their studies and a confidence in their ability to succeed. Teachers have an excellent awareness of examination requirements so that students have a good understanding of what they need to do to be successful.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well. Students are able to reflect and empathise on their learning. For example, in an English lesson students were able to use these skills to reflect and infer from World War 1 poetry.
- Marking is regular in all subjects and provides useful information for the students about how well they are doing and what steps they need to take to improve their learning. However not all teachers give students enough opportunity to extend their learning by responding to teachers' written comments about their work.
- In most lessons, teachers monitor students' progress carefully and adapt activities if students find them too easy or too hard. However sometimes the less able are not challenged sufficiently for them to make the best progress they should. This is because the learning activities are not set at the right level, sometimes students find the tasks too easy and students then lose concentration.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is calm

and respectful. Students are very proud of their school. They make their way to lessons promptly after break and lunchtime and are well prepared for the lesson.

- School records show any incidents of poor behaviour are managed well by teachers, support staff and the pastoral team.
- Students say they know how to keep themselves safe, particularly when using the internet or social media. Bullying is rare. They say this is because of the strong support they receive from the school.
- Parents are overwhelmingly pleased at how well the school supports their children. Many parents commented on how well the school's pastoral staff care for, and nurture their children. Communication between parents and staff is good, particularly via school's website.
- Students are attentive and keen to learn and to respond to teachers' questions. They are respectful to each other and work well on their own or in groups.
- The sixth form take on many different responsibilities around the school and within the local community. Students, from other year groups, value student voice but told inspectors they would like to take on more responsibility around the school, for example, leading assemblies.
- Attendance has improved and is currently above average. There remains a small proportion of students, however, whose attendance is persistently below average. A number of these students are eligible for pupil premium funding. The school has in place a number of strategies to work with families to help students improve their attendance.
- The Academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. All statutory requirements for safeguarding students are met. Staff are vigilant and act to ensure students' safety. All personnel checks are carried out and safeguarding records kept well.

The leadership and management are good

- School leaders are relentless in their ambition to raise achievement and improve the quality of teaching further. Governors and staff share this. Leaders and governors know their school well and have correctly identified key areas for improvement. Their actions have led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching, for example in science and mathematics.
- Effective partnership working with the Trust has helped the school to make rapid changes to the impact leaders and managers have, particularly on teaching and learning. The school has a relentless focus on improving the teaching skills of staff and as a result, standards are improving at a faster rate than typically found in some subjects.
- The setting of targets for teachers to improve the effectiveness of their teaching is rigorous and is linked very closely to the tracking and monitoring of teaching and learning. This robust system helps the school to hold teachers to account and to support them in identifying training needs and are linked closely to pay scales.
- The curriculum has been skilfully adapted to meet students' needs, including the development of their skills in English and mathematics. The curriculum offers an extensive range of courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

- Students benefit from a large range of after school and enrichment activities, including sports clubs, extension classes and visits to Oxbridge and Russell group universities.
- Partnerships with the local college and other providers help to provide access to appropriate vocational courses for about 80 students in Key Stage 4.
- Staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire were very positive about how well the school is led and managed.
- The Bedfordshire East Multi-Academy Trust is exerting an effective influence on the academy's development, through keeping a strategic overview and facilitating access to the expertise and experience from the Teaching School within the Trust.
- The ability of middle leaders to identify and track progress has developed considerably since the academy opened. They recognise their responsibilities for improving how well students do in the subjects they manage and are starting to track the quality of teaching and learning effectively.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides strong support and challenge to senior leaders. Governors are knowledgeable about the quality of teaching and keep a close eye on the impact of strategies to improve it further. They know how well students are achieving compared to those in other schools. Governors take good care of the school's finances and know in detail how the school is using pupil premium funding. They are very aware that the gap in attainment between pupils eligible for the funding and others is starting to close. Teachers' performance is linked to salary progression and students' achievement at all levels. The governing body has supported the Principal in taking robust and effective action where there has been underperformance. Governors make sure that all statutory requirements, including those relating to 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	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	442093

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1648
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	462
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clare Morris
Principal	Robert Robson
Date of previous school inspection	2 October 2012
Telephone number	01462 629900
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