

Stanchester Academy

East Stoke, Stoke-sub-Hamdon, Somerset TA14 6UG

Inspection dates	2–3 February 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The Principal's vision and leadership have been instrumental in transforming the culture and ethos at the school.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders' relentless focus on raising achievement has led to more pupils making good progress in more subjects, including English and mathematics.
- An effective and personalised training programme for teachers, closely aligned to school improvement priorities, is improving the quality of teaching.
- Teachers know their pupils well. Strong relationships between staff and pupils are founded on teachers' collective belief in pupils' ability to achieve well.
- Leaders and teachers are very effective in monitoring the progress of each and every pupil. This ensures that any sign of underachievement is tackled quickly.
- Pupils' conduct around the site is good. Pupils are very proud ambassadors for the school and they have high aspirations.
- The school promotes a healthy culture of reading among all pupils. Regular reading for all pupils is increasing their confidence in reading and is raising standards.
- Governors are very effective. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They challenge school leaders well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers make sure that pupils act on the feedback they are given on their work.
- Teaching is not always challenging enough for the most-able pupils in each class to achieve their potential because it is not yet consistently of high quality.
- A small number of pupils do not attend the school regularly enough.
- Some pupils' attitudes to learning do not allow them to make rapid progress because they do not push themselves to their limits.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and achievement further across the school so that it is consistently of high quality by ensuring that:
 - the most-able pupils in each class are challenged to fully meet their potential
 - feedback on pupils' work is used consistently to improve their progress.

- Further develop the culture of high aspiration and achievement by helping pupils to push themselves more to extend their learning.

- Raise levels of attendance for the small number of pupils who are persistently absent.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The strength and resilience of the Principal have transformed the ethos and culture at the school. A real sense of pride and belonging echoes throughout the school. The uncompromising drive from the Principal underpins the work of the school. Staff are ambitious and committed to ensure each pupil achieves their very best.
- The Principal's high expectations and relentless focus on raising standards have led to many improvements in pupils' achievement. He has led the school effectively by providing clear direction. As a result, staff demonstrate a strong commitment to further improvement.
- The new leadership structure and improved systems to manage teachers' performance ensure clear accountability for the progress of each pupil. Year team leaders now focus well on supporting pupils' academic progress, personal development and well-being, particularly those who are vulnerable.
- Leaders use accurate assessment information to monitor the progress of all pupils effectively. Those pupils who are at risk of falling behind are quickly identified. Timely and effective actions are taken to support them. As a result of this detailed analysis and swift support, more pupils in the school are making better progress.
- School leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within the school. They support and learn from each other well. This collaborative responsibility has been successful in improving all aspects of the school.
- Senior leaders' effective pursuit of high-quality teaching in all subject areas lies at the heart of the school's improvement, although this is not yet in place in all departments. Leaders hold teachers to account and ensure that the teachers take appropriate action to support pupils, although teachers' feedback is a less effective part of the school's practice.
- Subject leaders' energy and drive to seek solutions and remove any potential barriers to pupils' learning are mostly improving the quality of teaching and raising achievement. However, the quality of middle leadership varies in a minority of subject areas.
- All staff highly value the effective training they receive. The well-planned comprehensive range of training is closely aligned to the school improvement priorities. It also meets the needs of individual staff well. An open culture among staff has led to good sharing of ideas about effective teaching. The Principal has very clear expectations of the performance of all teachers. Pupils are also clear that only the best teaching is good enough for Stanchester. Teachers are held firmly to account for the progress of the pupils they teach. The Principal and other leaders tackle any underperformance effectively.
- The well-planned curriculum is regularly reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose. Recent changes show that pupils in Years 10 and 11 are following a more challenging academic curriculum. Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for this challenge, which includes a sharp focus on improving pupils' skills in reading and writing.
- Leaders provide a number of additional learning opportunities for all pupils, including clubs, trips and visits. Pupils value these opportunities, as shown by the large numbers of pupils taking part. For example, during the inspection, a large number of pupils were enthusiastically preparing for the forthcoming school drama and music production.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well planned and well led. Pupils are courteous to each other and show tolerance and understanding of different backgrounds and faiths. Leaders are aware of gaps in pupils' understanding of different cultures in Britain. Well-thought-out plans are in place to address this. Many pupils take on leadership roles which prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders target additional funding well and review its impact on pupils' achievement rigorously. As a result, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is rising in all year groups. In Years 7, 8 and 9, disadvantaged pupils achieve in line with their peers. The effective use of this funding has raised the achievement of pupils who enter the school with very low starting points in mathematics or English.
- School leaders make highly effective use of external support by commissioning reports and reviews to validate their own evaluation of the school's work. This has been invaluable to helping governors to challenge senior leaders to ensure that the outcomes for pupils are improving.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
 - Governors support and challenge school leaders well to bring about further improvement.
 - Governors are aware of the importance of focusing on the progress of all groups of pupils. Most governors have a clear knowledge of how additional funding is spent, although not all are fully aware of the impact on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

- Governors ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding are effective. They show a good awareness of their statutory responsibilities and importance of the wider aspects of safeguarding for pupils at the school.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Timely, accurate record-keeping and regular training ensure that staff are vigilant. As a result, the culture of safety is strong across the whole school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- 'Every lesson counts' is the target the school leaders have set and teachers are working effectively towards achieving it. As a result, most pupils make at least good progress and achieve well.
- The relationships between teachers and pupils lead to prompt pupils' responses in lessons and high levels of engagement.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge well and there is strong teaching in most subjects. Teachers are clear about what pupils should learn which helps most pupils to achieve well, as seen in Year 11 pupils' English work, for example.
- Teachers make effective use of the school's new assessment system. Teachers use this to ensure that learning is matched well to what pupils can do. In every subject, teachers identify accurately where pupils are in their learning. They make sure that pupils know where they are and what they need to do to improve. This helps pupils to make at least good progress.
- Pupils make excellent progress where they are challenged to achieve their best. For example, the work of Year 11 pupils in history shows clearly the high expectations set by the teacher that lead pupils to push themselves to do as well as they can. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning and produce high-quality work. However, not all teachers challenge the most-able pupils in their classes to do as well they can.
- The quality of teachers' feedback to pupils about their work has improved. Pupils value the feedback and it helps them to improve the quality of their work. Feedback is largely in line with the school policy, although this is not always clear how pupils are expected to respond to the feedback they are given.
- Teachers set and mark homework regularly. Pupils understand the importance of homework and how it contributes to the progress they make. Staff provide effective support through the '3 to 4 club' and other additional sessions to ensure pupils can complete work and secure their understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Learning for the pupils is varied and planned well to include life skills lessons, a programme of daily sessions with their tutors, assemblies and whole days that focus on particular aspects of their personal development. As a result, pupils are well informed and say they are cared for well.
- Pupils are punctual and well prepared for lessons. A confident, 'business-like' and mature approach is taken to learning by most pupils. A good understanding of the importance of these personal skills in preparation for later life is helping to improve the school culture. Year 11 pupils talk about how the culture has changed and it is now 'cool to achieve'. They say that this is as a result of high expectations and improvements in teaching.
- Pupils feel safe at the school. Pupils have a clear awareness of the importance of keeping safe and the dangers of using the internet. All pupils asked were well informed about the different forms of bullying and incidents in the school are rare. Pupils are very clear about the 'zero tolerance' approach taken by leaders when bullying does happen.
- The school is highly effective in looking after the pupils' well-being. A number of support services, including the school nurse and specialist provision for some pupils, are integrated well through 'the hub'. These additional services contribute well to the development of pupils' emotional and physical health and well-being. Pupils say that they feel well supported and value the genuine 'belief in them' that all staff display. This view was echoed in the responses from Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- Careers guidance is planned well and effective. Pupils talk positively about the support they are given to help make the right choice for their future. Visits, such as the visit to the local careers fair in Yeovil, are helping pupils to explore different routes available for them when they leave the school. As a result, pupils feel confident and well informed about the post-16 routes open to them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. Most pupils are proud of their work and present it well. Pupils follow instructions well; however, not all pupils show a positive attitude to their learning. In some lessons, pupils lack an 'eagerness for learning' and do not push themselves hard enough to reach their potential.
- Pupils' conduct around the site is good. Pupils treat each other with respect and younger pupils look up to the older pupils as positive role models. Many pupils aspire to become a 'blue tie' Year 11 prefect, for which there is a real kudos. This is just one of the many leadership opportunities that are having a positive impact on increasing pupils' responsibility in the school.
- The large majority of the pupils attend the school regularly. Pupils' overall attendance is currently in line with other schools nationally. A very small number of pupils still do not attend well enough; as a result, their progress is slowed. The school is working hard to improve their attendance. However, improvement is slow.
- There has been a recent small increase in the number of pupils who have been excluded for a fixed period of time. This reflects the senior leaders' higher expectations of pupils' behaviour and is confined to a small number of older pupils.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision are well looked after and supported well.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- The achievement of pupils at the school has risen significantly in a range of subject areas. More pupils left the school in 2015 with five good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics than previously. Pupils' achievement was well above the national average and the gap between the performance of girls and boys has closed.
- Attainment in a number of subjects is now high, particularly in photography, art and design, applied business studies and history. High achievement is the result of consistently high-quality teaching and close monitoring of pupils' progress. The attainment of pupils in science is rising, although too slowly. Leaders are taking appropriate action, but the full impact is yet to be felt.
- The improvement in pupils' progress in English and mathematics has been rapid. The large majority of pupils now make good or better progress in English and mathematics, often from a low starting point. Pupils' progress is now at least in line with or above the national average.
- Pupils currently in Year 11 are on track to meet or exceed the challenging targets set by school leaders. Further improvements are predicted in all subjects, including in languages where achievement has historically been poor. The school leaders' current assessment information indicates that the achievement of pupils across the school continues to rise in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- The achievement of pupils who have special educational needs or disability has risen. Pupils, often from low starting points, now make excellent progress across the school. As a result, the gap in attainment between this group and others nationally is closing.
- The performance of disadvantaged pupils is rapidly increasing. Since the previous inspection, the achievement of this group has increased in all subjects, often from lower starting points than their peers. The achievement of current pupils continues to rise and the gap between their performance and that of their peers is closing. In some subjects, they perform in line with or above others nationally. This is particularly the case in English where the gap is minimal.
- Achievement of the most-able pupils is improving. Teachers' high expectations and good teaching is raising the achievement of this group. This is not yet consistently at the high level expected in all classes in all years.
- School leaders are developing an effective culture for reading. All pupils read daily and value this opportunity. An initiative to buddy pupils from Years 10 and 7 and share reading experiences regularly is raising the younger pupils' understanding of the importance of reading. As a result, the confidence and reading abilities of pupils across the school are rising.
- A very small number of pupils attend alternative provision as part of their learning. Pupils attend well and are making good progress.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning. The number of pupils going on to higher-level courses when they leave the school at age 16 is increasing. Pupils feel confident and ready for the next stage in their learning.

School details

Unique reference number	137080
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10009402

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	560
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Susan Collard
Principal	Jason Beardmore
Telephone number	01935 823200
Website	www.stanchester-academy.co.uk
Email address	office@stanchester-academy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 January 2014

Information about this school

- Stanchester Academy is a smaller-than-average secondary school.
- There has been a restructure in leadership since the previous inspection.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is above the national average. This is additional government funding to support pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are in the care of the local authority, and funding for pupils from service families.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below the national average.
- The school is part of the South West Teaching School Alliance (SWTSA), 'Challenge Partners' and PIXL, and as a result works with other schools locally and nationally to share best practice and offer peer-to-peer review.
- The school is currently receiving support from an external school improvement partner.
- The school uses an alternative provider, South Somerset Partnership, for a very small number of pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning through short visits to a variety of lessons and 28 part lessons across a wide range of subjects and year groups. Many of the lessons were observed jointly with leaders from the school. Inspectors also observed tutorial sessions and assemblies.
- Discussions took place with the Principal, other leaders in the school, various members of staff and three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, minutes of meetings, external reviews and reports, records of leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, assessment and tracking information for current pupils, and behaviour and attendance data.
- Inspectors spoke to many pupils from all year groups about their experience at the school. During lessons, inspectors looked carefully at the quality of pupils' work and the accuracy of the school's assessment information.
- Inspectors took into account the 70 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online survey) and the 37 responses to the staff questionnaire.

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