

Sandwell Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134993
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	381771
Inspection dates	23–24 November 2011
Reporting inspector	James McNeillie HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	0–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1253
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	324
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roy Harrison
Headteacher	Simon Topper
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2009
School address	Halfords Lane West Bromwich West Midlands B71 4LG
Telephone number	0121 5251700
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Email address	info@sandwellacademy.com

Registered childcare provision	Sandwell Academy Nursery – EY348290
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	21
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	10 November 2009

Age group	0–19
Inspection date(s)	23–24 November 2011
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed learning in 37 lessons, or parts of lessons, taught by 36 teachers. The team met with groups of students, senior and middle leaders, members of the governing body and one of the academy's sponsors. In addition, they observed the work of the academy, including that of the nursery, and looked at a wide range of documentation supplied by the academy including that related to safeguarding, students' achievement and school improvement planning. The views of 481 parents and carers, a sample of students and a number of staff were taken into account.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Do all groups of students make outstanding progress overall and are any gaps in achievement narrowing?
- Is teaching sufficiently challenging and personalised to support all groups of students, including the most-able, in making rapid progress?
- Are leaders at all levels involved effectively in rigorous and extensive monitoring that leads to better outcomes for all groups of students?
- How well has the academy addressed issues raised previously relating to the Early Years Foundation Stage?

Information about the school

The academy opened in 2006 and the first cohort of students to attain GCSE grades was in 2011. This is a larger-than-average sized academy, with a broadly average-but-increasing proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals. A below-average proportion of students are identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Of those who are identified as such, most have moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Students come from a diverse range of ethnic groups. The largest numbers are from White British and Indian heritages, with smaller numbers from Caribbean, Pakistani and mixed heritages.

The academy is sponsored by the Mercer's Company of the City of London, Thomas Telford School, HSBC Education Trust, Tarmac Ltd and West Bromwich Albion Football Club. Its specialisms are in sport and business enterprise.

Sandwell Academy Nursery provides registered childcare for up to 21 children aged from birth to five. It is open 47 weeks per year and from 8am until 5.30pm.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

'At this academy, everybody is a somebody'. That comment from a student encapsulates very clearly one of the many reasons why Sandwell Academy is outstanding.

The teaching students experience each day is good and improving, with some that is outstanding. The high-quality, innovative and specialist curriculum that is tailored precisely to the needs of students is a substantial factor in explaining why students make such strong progress. The impact of those two aspects of provision, together with the exemplary care and support they receive, mean that students' achievement is outstanding. Many aspects of their personal development are also outstanding and they are exceptionally well prepared for life. Students are proud to be members of the academy. They show it by their good behaviour and their excellent relationships with each other and with members of staff. It is evident also in their substantial commitment to supporting the highly cohesive and harmonious academy community. The outstanding safeguarding procedures make a significant contribution to why students told inspectors they feel extremely safe. Students have a precise understanding of what makes for a healthy lifestyle and apply this knowledge exceptionally well, supported by the impact of the academy's successful specialism in sport.

The many strengths of teaching include lively and engaging lessons that are planned carefully to focus on the skills and knowledge that need to be learned. Much of the teachers' marking helps students to know what they need to do to improve and includes them in this process. Some otherwise strongly good teaching is not outstanding because teachers miss opportunities to take a step back and allow students to develop into sophisticated, independent learners. All lessons offer good challenge for the range of students' abilities. In the most effective, the activities chosen and the quality of questioning mean that the most-able students are stretched in their thinking and learning.

Focused and well-chosen links with a range of partners and sponsors enable the academy to offer students significant opportunities that otherwise would not be there, particularly in relation to the academy's specialisms of sport and business. Leaders work with striking impact to ensure that a wide range of parents and carers can contribute substantially to the academy's development.

Processes for self-evaluation are thorough, accurate and reviewed regularly at all

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levels of leadership. The outcomes are used to set consistently challenging targets and to identify how aspects of provision can be improved even further. Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching has improved and the other already outstanding aspects of the academy's provision have been enhanced. The effectiveness of leadership has also increased, bringing about improvements for children and babies in the nursery and students in the sixth form, both of which are also outstanding. The first set of GCSE results demonstrate the impact of the high-quality provision and leadership on the life chances of all the students. Those factors confirm that the academy has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching at each key stage by ensuring that:
 - all teachers support students to become sophisticated and independent learners
 - all lessons enhance the challenge for more-able students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

On entry to the academy, students' attainment is broadly average, although many have lower levels of literacy skills. By the end of Year 11, the students attain significantly above national averages, as shown, for example, in the 73% of students achieving grade C or above in five GCSE subjects including English and mathematics. When taking into account this above-average attainment and contextual factors, students make outstanding progress. The progress made by all groups of students in mathematics and the specialist subjects, by girls, those known to be eligible for free school meals, and by students of Indian heritage is particularly strong. Individuals and groups of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress also. That is as a result of high expectations of their achievement, the good-quality support they receive in lessons and the carefully tailored curriculum they experience. One parent commented that 'My son has a statement for speech and language. He has learnt Spanish with support and he is now working towards a grade A*.' Students exhibiting challenging behaviour and experiencing emotional difficulties achieve very well also, with many taking a positive and active part in lessons. A notable example of that was observed in a Year 8 physical education lesson, when one boy was able to apply his skills well in a team situation.

The very positive relationships that exist, students' good behaviour, and their excellent understanding of each other's similarities and differences all support their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A high proportion of students and all of the groups represented in the academy are involved in extra-curricular activities and in other roles that support the wider community. Students recommend which charities to support, the academy's winter uniform was altered as a result of their views, and they are involved in reflection and feedback on their

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learning. All students who have left the academy did so to be involved in further education, training or employment. That impressive fact, as well as students’ high attendance and their ability to apply with significant success a wide range of basic and personal skills, mean that they are exceptionally well prepared for the future. The inspection confirmed the view expressed by a parent that the academy ‘will give (my child) a great foundation for the future’.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The good- and better-quality day-to-day teaching that students experience is a strength of the academy. Teachers foster good relationships and plan enjoyable and relevant activities which focus on learning and engage students of varied ability. On the few occasions when teaching is satisfactory, teachers talk for too long, so slowing the pace of learning and lessons are heavily structured. A history lesson observed during the inspection had many of the characteristics of the outstanding teaching in the academy. The teacher had skilfully planned learning objectives to match the different levels of ability of students, who were heavily involved in their own learning. The students made exceptional progress because of a very high level of challenge, which was supported by greater depth of questioning and review.

The exceptional curriculum offered to students has developed from an already high starting point at the last inspection. The extensive business and community links provide memorable and enriching experiences, such as those involving the ‘industrial consultants’. There is an effective and well-embedded modular curriculum that links

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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closely with the assessment, recording and reporting system. A flexible set of 'pathways' for students, including high-quality and very successful vocational routes, means that individual needs are met very well. The online curriculum is increasingly personalised and matched to students' different needs. It enables collaborative planning for teachers and instant access for students when they need it. Cross-curricular provision for information and communication technology is exemplary and that for the development of literacy and numeracy skills is very strong. The significant strengths make a substantial contribution, in combination with the good and improving teaching, to students' outstanding progress.

Transition arrangements for those joining the academy in Year 7 are thorough and regarded very well by students. The level of care continues throughout a student's time at the academy with individual needs being met. The very large majority of parents and carers agree, with one commenting, 'my son has adopted a 'can do' attitude'. Exceptional support is given to students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable and academy leaders work very effectively with a wide range of external agencies. The personal tutor system ensures that all students have quick access to help if they need it. Detailed and perceptive information, advice and guidance are given when students are making choices about which courses to study, or where to go once they leave the academy.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The highest of expectations are set by the headteacher's inspirational leadership and these are embodied in challenging and aspirational targets for all aspects of academy life and in the work of leaders at all levels. Staff morale is high and is shown in the staff's commitment to extra-curricular activities and the highly valued additional support offered to students. The leadership of teaching and learning is outstanding. The impact of a more-rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation at all levels of leadership and the striking effect of well-targeted teacher training opportunities have made an exceptional contribution to improving the quality of teaching. The academy's well-moderated evaluation of teaching indicates that the proportion of outstanding teaching is improving rapidly. Rigorous tracking of the academic and personal progress students make means that any underachievement is addressed quickly and successfully. Those processes and the integral ethos that all students can and will achieve ensure that equality of opportunity is at the heart of the academy's work. Any gaps that do exist, for example in the attainment of boys and girls, are

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closing. The achievement of nationally underperforming groups of students, such as those known to be eligible for free school meals, is much better than that nationally. Members of the governing body bring with them a wide range of expertise, hold the academy to account with vigour and regularly evaluate their own work. Extremely effective means of communicating with parents and carers supports leaders’ outstanding effectiveness in this aspect. The academy knows its context precisely, which results in outstanding community cohesion. Students have a perceptive understanding of the similarities and differences between their lives and those of others in the national and the global community. At the time of the inspection, safeguarding procedures were exemplary. The academy leads on high-quality practice, for example in e-safety, and in its work with external agencies to ensure that students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable are cared for exceptionally well.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children show keen enjoyment of learning in the nursery and have well-developed personal and social skills, which are consistently demonstrated by all staff. Expectations of children are high and the children take responsibility readily, for example, by self-registering and placing their names on feeling charts. There are many opportunities for children to develop very well in all six areas of learning. Individual progress is monitored, from early baseline testing across all areas, with formal, termly reviews and ‘learning journeys’ confirming the excellent progress the children make. Children’s attainment is at least above national expectations for their age in each area of learning by the time they leave the nursery. The provision has been enhanced significantly since the last inspection by the new building of a dedicated outdoor play area. It is organised very well to enable children to make

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links with activities indoors and it is sufficiently varied to engage children consistently. The combination of the indoor and outdoor provision forms a highly stimulating and welcoming environment. Children are known as individuals, with one parent commenting that staff ‘take special care’. The highly skilled and trained nursery staff meet children’s needs exceptionally well. They work together closely and communicate openly with parents and carers. All registration requirements are in place. Leadership of the Stage is exemplary. The nursery manager is reflective, visionary and recognised locally as exceptional and, as a result, leads and demonstrates practices for other pre-school providers. Partnerships with parents and carers remain exceptional and have been strengthened further by parents’ and carers’ involvement in contributing to their children’s learning journals. There is continuous and sharp planning, monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the nursery.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

The progress students make in the sixth form is outstanding, with particularly strong achievement in applied and vocational qualifications. Students’ personal development is also outstanding and the students display mature attitudes to their own and others’ welfare. They make an increasingly strong contribution to the academy and the local community. Teaching in this phase of the academy matches that of the whole school and is often inspirational. The best practice is characterised by probing questioning and challenge, both of which are used to very good effect in developing students’ critical thinking skills. The curriculum is varied and inclusive and takes into account the needs of the students and of the local community. A wide range of extra-curricular activities and courses includes sporting, performance and leadership activities. Students receive excellent individual care and support through the pastoral and academic systems, with well-trained and active teams of careers advisers and tutors. The sixth-form leadership team has high expectations and has worked with drive and determination to produce improvements in outcomes for students, particularly through the rigorous monitoring and interventions to increase academic progress.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	1

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Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the questionnaire from parents and carers. The vast majority of those who responded agreed that the academy keeps their children safe and that they are well informed about their children’s progress. There was similarly high satisfaction with the effectiveness of the academy’s leadership and how well they viewed their children’s overall experience at Sandwell Academy. A very small minority raised concerns about students’ behaviour and a smaller number wrote comments related to bullying. Inspectors spent a significant amount of time examining the behaviour of students and how well cared for and free from discrimination they were. All those students spoken to were confident that if any issues such as bullying occurred, they would be dealt with quickly and effectively. That matched the response to the student questionnaire, where 97% of those who responded felt safe while in school. Academy leaders welcomed the feedback.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Sandwell Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 481 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1253 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	227	47	238	49	12	2	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	335	71	139	29	3	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	334	69	139	29	7	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	263	55	203	42	10	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	245	51	220	46	11	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	222	46	234	49	16	3	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	213	44	242	50	19	4	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	261	54	188	39	6	1	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	232	48	227	47	13	3	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	251	52	196	41	20	4	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	189	39	244	51	25	5	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	292	61	178	37	3	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	312	65	158	33	7	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Sandwell Academy, West Midlands, B71 4LG

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to us when we inspected your academy. Sandwell Academy is outstanding for many reasons, an important one being that you leave with above-average attainment and the progress you make is excellent. The contribution you, the student body, makes is very strong. Your good behaviour, positive attitudes to each other and to learning, and the significant contributions you make to life at the academy and the wider community are all very positive. You told us that you are exceptionally well prepared for the future and we agree with you. In part, that is to do with your high levels of attendance and so well done with that. You told us that you feel very safe in school, know how to be healthy and how to avoid risks in life. We agree.

Mr Topper and his colleagues are leading the academy in an outstanding way. The improvements made since the previous inspection have been substantial, including the fact that the sixth form and nursery are also now outstanding. The curriculum you experience is of the highest quality and is flexible enough to make sure there are qualifications and opportunities available to meet the needs of students with different abilities and interests. The sports and business enterprise specialisms are very important reasons why the curriculum is outstanding. The levels of support and guidance you receive from the wide range of staff employed by the academy are exceptional.

Much of the teaching you experience is good and some is outstanding. We have asked the academy to make more lessons outstanding by helping you to become more independent in your learning. We have also suggested that the level of challenge for the most-able students could be even greater than it currently is. You can help by continuing to respond well to your teachers' very high expectations.

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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