

Inspection of Sandwell Academy

Halfords Lane, West Bromwich, West Midlands B71 4LG

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected 10 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections.

Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

The headteacher of the school is James Saunders. This school is part of the Thomas Telford Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the executive adviser, Sir Kevin Satchwell, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Bowater.

What is it like to attend this school?

Sandwell Academy staff and pupils share the same high aspirations. Pupils understand and follow the school's ethos to 'be brave, be kind, be proud'. Relationships between pupils and staff are courteous and respectful. Pupils support each other's needs. Pupils are happy and feel safe. A parent comment, typical of others, is: 'Teachers go above and beyond to support students reaching their full potential.'

There is a purposeful atmosphere around the school. Pupils can focus on their learning well, work hard and want to learn. The majority of pupils show respectful and positive behaviours during structured lesson times. During unstructured times, such as breaks and lunch, they behave sensibly. Where pupils' behaviour is not acceptable, staff speak with them to explain the school's high expectations. This maintains the positive behaviours around the school.

The school places a strong emphasis on pupils' personal development. This includes mental health and well-being. Pupils can clearly explain their understanding of diversity and equality in society. Leadership opportunities include house captaincy, and sixth-form students act as mentors to younger pupils. The extra-curricular programme is rich and diverse. Pupils regularly take part in activities such as sports, music, chess, cadets and public speaking.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the last inspection and following a period of development in the school, there have been significant and highly effective staffing changes made. These include a new headteacher, who has successfully raised expectations around learning and behaviour. The school has developed a highly ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum. All pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), follow this curriculum. The school's actions to improve the curriculum have led to improving pupil outcomes by the end of key stage 4.

Students in the sixth form are exceptionally positive about their learning experiences and the wider opportunities the school provides. Sixth-form teachers engage students in ambitious, challenging and independent learning. This enables students to achieve highly. Students make a significant contribution to supporting younger pupils, for example through regular mentoring sessions and as student leaders within the enrichment activities. Students benefit greatly from this exceptional provision.

The school has accurately identified the important things that pupils need to know to succeed. The majority of teachers present new subject matter clearly. Most pupils remember their previous knowledge well, which helps them to understand new learning. For example, pupils in Year 9 English recalled their previous knowledge and understanding of Victorian society and literature to compare with their current text. However, in a small number of lessons, teachers do not know whether pupils have

secured the important knowledge before moving on. This results in some pupils struggling to build on previous learning because they have not grasped the key skills and knowledge from before.

The majority of pupils display excellent self-control and highly positive attitudes to learning. However, a few pupils do not always focus on their learning well enough. In a small number of cases, pupils behave inappropriately within the school setting. The school acts swiftly to address the occasions when this happens, which helps to maintain the high standards of behaviour generally seen. School attendance is high, with robust systems in place to support absent pupils to catch up on their work quickly.

The school quickly identifies pupils with SEND. All staff receive precise information about pupils' individual needs. Teachers use this information effectively to adapt their teaching. The school has implemented an extensive range of strategies to support pupils who are not confident readers. These include specialist teachers who rapidly address weaknesses in phonics, grammar and comprehension. The school ensures that pupils who need additional reading support receive it rapidly.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum, including those aspects within the Personal Tutor Time ('PT'), is well planned and sequenced. In most lessons, pupils learn about topics such as healthy relationships and online safety well. However not all pupils can remember the most important information within 'PT'. Some teachers do not always present the information effectively, or discuss with pupils in sufficient depth why the information is important. This means that some pupils are not always challenged about their understanding of mental health, for example. Pupils and students in the sixth form discuss careers, university aspirations and apprenticeships, which helps them to choose their next steps after school.

Trustees and governors know the school very well. They support and challenge leaders appropriately in meetings and on their visits to the school. They hold the school to account well for all aspects of provision, including their robust and rigorous focus on safeguarding and the quality of SEND provision. The school has implemented a well-thought-out professional development programme for staff. Staff workload is carefully considered, which staff are appreciative of.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, some teachers do not consistently check that all pupils understand and remember what has been learned. This means that some pupils do not fully retain and recall the necessary knowledge to support new learning.

The school should ensure that all teachers check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching accordingly so that pupils become secure in the key knowledge they need.

- In some subjects, the work and activities provided to pupils, including opportunities to use oracy and to debate and discuss topics, are not always well matched to the curriculum content. As a result, this slows pupils' learning in these subjects. Leaders should ensure that teachers set appropriate activities and work, including oracy, to promote discussions and debate matched to the curriculum content in all subjects.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	134993
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10322813
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,396
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	396
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Bowater
Headteacher	James Saunders
Website	www.sandwellacademy.com
Date of previous inspection	16 and 17 January 2014

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Thomas Telford Multi Academy Trust, which contains five schools.
- The headteacher was appointed to the school in September 2022.
- The school makes use of three alternative providers for five pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors focused on the following deep dives: English, geography, mathematics, physical education and Spanish. The inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about their learning. The inspectors also looked at the curriculum in other subjects.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about pupils' behaviour, attendance, the school's curriculum and improvement planning. The school's website was also checked.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors observed informal times of the day as part of their evaluation of safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- The inspectors held meetings with the chair of the trust, executive adviser of the trust and other representatives of the local governing board and trust, the headteacher and other senior leaders, teachers and pupils. The inspectors also talked informally to pupils, staff, parents and carers to gather information about school life.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View and the free-text comments. The inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Stuart Clarkson, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jacqueline Newsome	Ofsted Inspector
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