

Saffron Walden County High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136776
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	384798
Inspection dates	16-17 May 2012
Lead inspector	Derrick Baughan HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Non-Maintained
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2026
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	566
Appropriate authority	Saffron Academy Trust
Chair	Mark Hayes
Headteacher	John Hartley
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2007
School address	Audley End Road Saffron Walden CB11 4UH
Telephone number	01799 513030
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Derrick Baughan	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jalil Shaikh	Additional Inspector
Neil Stanley	Additional Inspector
David Turner	Additional Inspector
Janice Williams	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. A total of 57 classes and 54 teachers were observed including six joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, a significant number of shorter visits were made to classes to evaluate specific aspects of the school's provision, for example students' behaviour and attitudes to learning. Inspectors met with staff, leaders and managers, and the Chairman of the Academy Trust. Inspectors observed many aspects of the school's work. Inspectors paid particular attention to the school's evaluation of its own performance and looked closely at the standard of students' work and the quality of marking and feedback to students. Inspectors took account of the responses on 278 questionnaires received from parent and carers, and those from staff and students.

Information about the school

Saffron Walden County High School (SWCHS) is larger than the average secondary school and has a large sixth form. The school became an academy in June 2011 and is governed by Saffron Academy Trust, of which there is only one member school, SWCHS. However, leaders decided to continue to refer to it as a school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below that found nationally, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is low. The proportion of students who are disabled or identified as having special educational needs, and supported by school action or a statement of particular need, is very low. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- Saffron Walden County High School is an outstanding school providing an outstanding quality of education for all its students. The sixth form is outstanding with sustained very high retention and achievement.
- Achievement is outstanding. Students are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their lives. They make outstanding progress in all subjects. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make outstanding progress. GCSE results have been consistently above average over the last three years and rose significantly in 2011. Achievement in vocational provision is very high. Students gain a range of additional skills that contribute to their outstanding progress, such as taking responsibility for their own learning.
- Inspectors observed a very high proportion of good teaching with a significant proportion that was outstanding. Outstanding leadership of teaching focuses well on improvement and excellent staff development. As a result, teachers plan lessons very well and include a range of activities to meet the needs of students both as groups and as individuals. Marking usually provides excellent feedback to students but in a few cases it is not sufficiently detailed to help students know how to improve their work.
- Students are extremely polite. Their behaviour in lessons is outstanding and supports their learning extremely well. They take enormous pride in their school. Students' behaviour around the school is exemplary and results in a very respectful and safe environment.
- Leaders and managers work extremely well to establish a culture of continuous improvement, resulting in an excellent learning experience for all students. The school's outstanding curriculum ensures that there is an appropriate pathway for each student to follow. Strategic planning is excellent and effective delegation of decision making means that staff have the confidence to be innovative in the classroom and their work. The development of students' spiritual moral social and cultural awareness is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By March 2013, improve the quality of written feedback to students by ensuring

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that all their work is marked to an equally high standard.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students join the school with attainment that is above average. As a result of outstanding teaching students make excellent progress at all key stages. This is because the school's systems for monitoring progress, for support, and for advice and guidance are highly effective. Attainment by students, as observed by inspectors in lessons, is outstanding. Attainment by the end of Key Stages 4 and 5 is well above average.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs make outstanding progress. The achievement of students speaking English as an additional language is comparable to their peers. In the past girls made slightly better progress than boys. The school is successfully closing the gap in achievement between boys and girls by a concerted effort to accelerate boys' progress. Parents and carers agree with inspectors findings about progress.

In addition to examination success students gain a range of skills, for example those of team working and leadership. The take-up rates for the wide range of extra-curricular activities available are very high. For example, over 400 students are studying a musical instrument and the vast majority of these students take part in one or more of the many orchestras and ensembles, which play to a high standard. Inspectors observed outstanding progress in the development of reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills. Students have extremely good independent learning skills. Their ability to work with teachers, and each other, to develop their understanding is exceptionally well developed.

Quality of teaching

The very large majority of teaching observed was good or better, with much that was outstanding. The inspectors' view that teaching is typically outstanding is confirmed by students', and parents' and carers' questionnaire responses. Teachers plan their lessons very well, using a wide range of well judged and often imaginative strategies that, together with sharply focused and timely support and intervention, match individual needs exceptionally well. Questioning and discussion are used particularly well and teachers are highly effective in ensuring that all students participate in these discussions. Group work is used purposefully to make the most of students highly developed independent learning skills. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge well, to help students learn and to develop their resilience and confidence in tackling challenging activities, such as extension questions in mathematics. All teachers have consistently high expectations for all students. Teachers systematically and effectively check students' understanding throughout lessons and give excellent verbal feedback which raises students' confidence and

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helps them develop their subject knowledge and ability to learn. As a result, students are passionate about, and fully committed to, their learning.

Support for students is outstanding. Assessment and monitoring have improved significantly since the previous inspection leading to improved GCSE success rates. Detailed discussions between staff and students, when setting targets, ensure that these targets are very challenging, are understood very well by students, are informed by thorough initial assessment and are monitored rigorously. Excellent communication between subject teachers and tutors means that any dips in progress are identified early. Interventions are swift and effective. Support for disabled students and those with special educational needs is excellent so that these students make outstanding progress. Clear and detailed information is readily available for all staff involved. The support provided by learning support staff in lessons is excellent and complements that provided by the subject teacher.

The school has replaced effort grades with learning scores. These are part of a very effective system that focuses extremely well on the students' learning experience and how that can be improved. Marking of much of the work of students is very thorough, with good use made of detailed comments about what worked well and how the work would even better if the students had included the additional points identified. However, inspectors found that in a few cases the marking of work in students' books did not provide feedback in sufficient depth to help them know how to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The behaviour of students around the school, and typically over time, is outstanding, as observed by inspectors and commented upon positively by parents, carers, staff and students. A culture of respect gives students a keen sense of ownership of their own behaviour. They are extremely polite, for example inspectors observed that students invariably responded to "thank you" with "you're welcome". They help and support each other well. Because of this exemplary behaviour, movement of the large student population around the school is calm and purposeful. As a result of this and a five minute transition time between lessons, lessons start promptly

Students' positive attitude to learning and their keen interest in lessons helps them make outstanding progress in lessons. Students thoroughly enjoy working independently and in small groups to get the most out of their lessons. Inspectors saw no examples of poor behaviour.

Behaviour is well managed with a range of effective systems such as a community code, developed by students in consultation with leaders. Sixth form students play a leading role in developing and monitoring codes of behaviour. Students have an excellent knowledge of the different types of bullying, such as cyber bullying and racist bullying. They work well with leaders to prevent bullying and as a result incidents are very rare. The school is active and highly effective in managing bullying and deals well with incidents. As a result of the high level of enjoyment and a very

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inclusive school community, attendance rates and levels of punctuality are very high. The number of exclusions has been consistently reduced and is well below the national average. The overwhelming majority of students, staff, and parents and carers agree with inspection outcomes that students are safe at school.

Leadership and management

SWCHS is led exceptionally well and the pursuit of excellence is a theme that runs throughout the school. Student achievement, and how to improve it, is at the centre of every activity that the school undertakes. Target setting, at whole school, curriculum area and individual student level is highly developed. An excellent culture of delegated decision-making and regular consultation means that staff at all levels have confidence in, and the support of, senior managers. This allows staff to be innovative both in the classroom and their decision making.

A vibrant, active research group leads staff effectively in reviewing and improving their teaching. Regular staff development events make good use of the research group's findings, which are discussed in detail. For example, work on the effective use of discussion and debate has resulted in students being able to discuss controversial issues eloquently and with little input from the teacher. Regular and rigorous lesson observations are highly effective in helping staff, who are exceptionally keen to learn from lesson observation feedback. Good use of the outcomes from these observations ensures well targeted professional development for individual teachers.

Methods of assessing performance are rigorous and used well to secure improvement. Data are used particularly well to monitor and improve the performance of individual students, curriculum areas and the whole school. Systems to monitor data and provide useful information are thorough and effective. Self-evaluation at department level is thorough and middle managers are held to account well by senior leaders. Action plans at department level are carefully matched to whole school priorities and their impact upon outcomes is monitored well by middle managers. The school knows itself very well. Regular self-evaluation results in a report which is detailed, judgemental and very accurate. The school's profile of lesson observation grades matches very closely that found by inspectors.

The curriculum is outstanding because it is very well designed, in consultation with students, to provide them with a rich and rewarding experience and meet their needs well at all key stages. The curriculum includes a range of vocational options and is enhanced by many extra-curricular activities, including a wide range of sport and music, contributing well to students' social and cultural development. At Key Stage 3, students have a fortnightly lesson in how to become independent learners. The curriculum for disabled students and those with special educational needs is also outstanding. The excellent induction programme for students who enter the sixth form from other schools means that they integrate quickly into the school.

Governance is outstanding. Members of the governing body play a significant part in

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school life by regular visits and meetings with staff to gather evidence about how well the school is doing. They provide excellent challenge to senior leaders and hold them to account very well. Arrangements for safeguarding are excellent. As a result of a well established culture of respect and its embedding across the curriculum, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school has a very effective system for engaging with students to get their views. Students make good use of the multi-cultural information that is readily available to them and the benefit they get from the large number of cultural and foreign visits students, to develop a thorough understanding of, and respect for, other cultures. The promotion of equality and diversity is embedded well within school activities resulting in students' strong sense of moral purpose.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.

18 May 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Saffron Walden County High School, Saffron Walden CB11 4UH

Thank you for the extremely polite and warm welcome that you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school. You are right to be extremely proud of your school, which we judged to be outstanding. We talked with many of you, sat in on many of your lessons and looked at much of your work. Two of us had the opportunity to listen to the rehearsals of your orchestra and concert band and enjoyed the quality of your playing.

You have a passion for learning and this, together with the outstanding teaching that you receive, results in excellent achievement. In lessons you work very well either as a whole class or in small groups. We were particularly impressed with your independent learning skills. Your outstanding behaviour makes a significant contribution to your enjoyment and progress in lessons.

We also observed that you maintain this passion for learning across all subjects and focus well on what you are doing, whether it is applying Pythagoras' Theorem or learning how to correctly stop a ball on the playing field. I enjoyed watching your enthusiasm for practical lessons, including assembling clocks and disassembling cakes.

The headteacher and senior staff lead your school exceptionally well. However, there is one area that we judged could be improved. We agree with you that your teachers are very good at giving you feedback on how to improve and much of the marking is of high quality. We did notice that in a few cases the work in your books was not marked in as much detail as the rest and we have asked Mr Hartley to work with the staff to improve this.

Once again thank you for your very courteous welcome. I wish you all well.

Yours sincerely

Derrick Baughan
Her Majesty's Inspector

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