

Inspection of a good school: Sandwell Community School

Westminster Road, West Bromwich, West Midlands B71 2JN

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 April 2024

Outcome

Sandwell Community School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The majority of pupils enter the school having had long-term disruption to their education. Many have deeply ingrained patterns of poor attendance. When they enter the school through the Assessment Centre of Learning, all pupils are supported to re-engage positively with education. Leaders use initial assessments carefully to decide what pupils need in order to succeed.

Over time, pupils develop increasingly positive attitudes towards education, start to attend more regularly and improve their behaviour. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their actions. They develop their thinking to consider the consequences of the choices they make on themselves and others and how this will affect their future.

The school is very ambitious for its pupils. Staff help them to build towards high-quality qualifications or a return to a mainstream school. As a crucial part of this work, many pupils move to the Main School Centre of Learning. They are supported well in this transition. The curriculum on offer allows pupils to experience a wide range of subjects in preparation for their next steps.

Pupils have strong and positive relationships with staff, who they know want the best for them. Pupils feel safe and know there is someone to help when they need them, either for educational or personal reasons.

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

The school works hard to understand everything about the pupils they encounter. Leaders have ensured that pupils' needs are analysed carefully to give them the bespoke support they require. Staff work with parents and carers and external agencies to gather a detailed picture of pupils' life experience. This includes important background information around attendance and safeguarding.

Pupils often arrive with unrecognised or unmet special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). On joining the school, pupils are carefully assessed. All possible barriers to learning are considered, including reading ability and any possible SEND. Through additional funding, the school has been able to do significant work to support those with speech and language needs very successfully. Leaders work effectively to ensure they gather all relevant safeguarding information about their pupils. The school has strong connections with wider agencies, such as the police and youth justice. A range of external support is used to help pupils. This includes a wide array of work to meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education provided is a great help to the pupils. The school's analytical approach means that the curriculum is carefully built to include aspects that are particularly relevant to pupils and their experiences. Staff also ensure that they are responsive to local issues. These are dealt with in a sensitive and timely manner, using group work and one-to-one support as needed. The personal development work builds strategically and carefully to develop pupils' understanding of themselves, different relationships and their possible futures. Pupils are supported well to think about their next steps. Staff help pupils to realise the small actions they need to take to enter their desired career. The school ensures that, where possible, pupils can undertake work experience.

There is an ambitious curriculum for all pupils across the three Centres of Learning. Staff have a strong focus on helping pupils to understand the key vocabulary they need to succeed. Teachers know the pupils well. They have constructive relationships with pupils and praise them regularly for their efforts and achievements. Pupils are supported well to engage with their learning on an appropriate level. However, teachers do not always select activities that match the ambitious nature of the planned curriculum. This means that pupils are not always engaged in tasks that help them to build their knowledge effectively.

Pupils express themselves well through their written work in lessons. For example, in English they can write effectively in several different styles. Pupils are encouraged to think and work well together. In mathematics, there is a focus on processes to aid pupils' understanding. However, sometimes teachers' delivery of the curriculum does not allow pupils to discuss ideas. This means pupils do not always have as many opportunities as they might to talk about what they are learning, or to develop their confidence in expressing themselves clearly. Leaders are working on developing pupils' oracy and know the importance of this.

The school is having an influence on local practice and working to improve the quality of information they receive about new and current pupils. While the school has significant challenges with attendance due to pupils' previous experiences, this is improving. The school is working hard to address the challenges of pupils travelling significant distances, which also has an impact on punctuality. There is work to be done around the school day to make sure that they are in school for long enough and to help pupils engage with education further.

Leaders at all levels recognise the challenges of working in this complex environment. Governors are clear about the strengths of the school and the areas for improvement. Recent changes to assessment policy have helped to reduce workload and staff appreciate this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not always select appropriate work for pupils to complete. This results in lost learning time so pupils do not make as much progress through the curriculum as they could. The school should support teachers to select tasks which match the ambitious curriculum consistently for all pupils and help to close gaps in knowledge.
- Attendance and punctuality are not as strong as they need to be. As a result both of absence and of lateness pupils miss valuable time in lessons. The school needs to consider how it might adjust the school day to support pupils to access more of the ambitious curriculum being delivered, as well as ensuring that when pupils do arrive in school, they go promptly to lessons so that no learning time is lost.
- Pupils are not always encouraged to express their thinking verbally in lessons. As a result, some remain reticent to do so. The school should work with staff to develop pupils' skills and confidence to better prepare them for their next steps.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2014.

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	135254
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10322816
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	142
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Andrew Moore-Stow
Executive Headteacher	Kevin Morgan
Website	www.sandwellcs.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a pupil referral unit and works with those pupils who have been, or at risk of being, permanently excluded.
- The school has four sites and is currently using three of them.
- The school refers to each site as a Centre of Learning.
- The school uses six alternative providers for a small number of pupils. Two of them are registered provisions and four are unregistered.
- A small number of pupils participate in education through online learning.
- During the previous and current academic year, the school has worked with many pupils and not all of these have entered the school.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 11 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school has received funding through the Department for Education's Alternative Provision Taskforce to provide additional support to pupils, including through speech and language therapy and mentoring.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors carried out this ungraded inspection under section 8 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 received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, the chair of governors, the local authority representative, other senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers. They also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors visited all three Centres of Learning that the school has currently open.
- 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 looked at records and spoke to staff in relation to attendance, behaviour and bullying.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, including leaders' plans to improve the school and their self-evaluation of the school's work.
- The inspectors took account of responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Richard Wakefield, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Russell Hinton

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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