

Stony Dean School

Orchard End Avenue, Amersham HP7 9JW

Inspection dates

5–6 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires Improvement	3
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher and other leaders, ably supported by staff and the governors, have improved the quality of the school's work through high quality training and thorough checking of teaching. This has led to rapid and sustained improvement in students' achievements.
- Members of the governing body have a wide range of skills that they use well to hold the school to account. They manage the budget extremely effectively, ensuring that disadvantaged students achieve as well as their peers.
- Parents are very pleased with their children's progress.
- Students' achievement in English and mathematics across the school is excellent because these subjects are taught exceptionally well. Students use their literacy and numeracy skills extremely well in other subjects.
- From often low starting points on entry to the school, students successfully attain GCSE passes in a wide range of subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- Improvements to the range of subjects offered and the very effective assessment and tracking systems ensure that work is particularly well matched to students' needs and abilities. As a result all groups of students achieve equally well.
- Outstanding promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development leads to their exceptional personal development. This, alongside the high levels of attention paid to developing students' independence, confidence and self-esteem, means that their personal development is very strong.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They are extremely polite and helpful. Students say they feel very safe at school and during their trips and visits.
- Teaching is typically outstanding. This is because of the very high quality of expectations and challenge. Very well-planned tasks fully engage all groups of students.
- The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Students in the sixth form gain a wide range of qualifications and work-related experiences that will help to sustain them in their futures.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 15 lessons, many of them jointly with the senior leaders. In addition, the inspectors also listened to some students reading.
- The inspectors spoke with several different groups of students.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the 'Buckinghamshire Learning Trust' representing the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents. These included the school's own information about students' progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and students' work.
- The inspectors took account of the 13 parent responses to the Ofsted online survey (Parent View). The 25 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
James Waite	Additional Inspector
Fiona Robinson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school caters for students with moderate learning difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorders. A small number of students have severe learning difficulties, hearing impairment, visual impairment, speech, language and communication needs and/or physical difficulties. All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- Pupils are placed at Stony Dean from a range of primary provision, special schools and designated units with a significant proportion (approx 70% each year) coming from mainstream schools.
- The majority of students are White British. About 20% are from a range of ethnic backgrounds including Pakistani, African or Other White backgrounds.
- A few students speak English as an additional language.
- About 25% of students are eligible for the pupil premium, which is broadly in line with national figures. This is additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by a local authority.
- The school does not receive any other additional funding.
- Alternative provision for the sixth form takes place at the local Amersham and Wickham College.
- Students come from all parts of Buckinghamshire and almost all travel to school in buses or taxis.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that classrooms in the main building are free from clutter so that they are more conducive to students' concentration and learning, particularly for those with autism.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher, effectively supported by other senior leaders and the governors, pursues excellence in all activities. She has ensured that students receive an excellent education through high quality leadership of teaching and through improvement to all aspects of the school's work. As a result the achievement of students is outstanding.
- Leaders, including governors, are highly ambitious and have an accurate view of the school's performance. They show high quality professional standards in their work and have high expectations of all groups of students. Staff are totally committed to ensuring that all students make the most rapid progress possible.
- The school has undergone significant new building works since the last inspection providing high quality additional specialist accommodation to meet the needs and abilities of the students extremely well. The older areas of the school, however, are less conducive to learning because they are sometimes cluttered and untidy. This occasionally impacts on the concentration of some students with autism.
- Policies and procedures for setting targets for teachers are fully in place and leaders ensure that salary increases are not awarded until teachers have met targets based on students' progress. Training for staff is clearly focused on school priorities. As a result students' achievement in literacy and numeracy is outstanding because teaching in these areas has improved rapidly in the past two years.
- A very effective range of subjects engages students exceptionally well and ensures that they enjoy learning and develop high quality independence. This all contributes very effectively to students' academic achievements, their physical skills and their personal development including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The experiences offered by the school support British values and contribute extremely well to students' preparation for life in modern Britain. For example the students undertake rambles, overnight stays, and have created their own memorial table for Remembrance Day, showing their empathy, outstanding behaviour and their awareness of safety. The school helps students with their next choices of education, training or work.
- Students' achievements are regularly assessed by leaders through the school's tracking system so that any student falling behind can quickly be helped to catch up. Consequently almost all students make the progress expected of them in English and mathematics and a very high proportion exceed the expected progress.
- Middle leaders, including those in charge of subjects, are supportive and helpful. They have been fully involved in the drive to improve. They have successfully promoted the sharing of best practice among all staff. This is why the use of literacy and numeracy in other subjects has improved.
- The school receives good support from the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust particularly in relation to monitoring the accuracy of students' outcomes.
- The vast majority of parents are very pleased with the school and those who responded to the online questionnaire said that their children are happy at school. There are highly successful strategies in place to engage parents through an effective partnership and through regular parent/student meetings.
- Partnerships with other schools and colleges are very effective, enabling leaders to moderate school achievements and ensure that judgments are accurate. Some shared experiences for older students enable them to broaden their work-related opportunities.
- Community links are very strong. Leaders have developed links with several local businesses and this has resulted in real opportunities for students to work in a wide range of situations and use a variety of skills, for example in local shops, garden centres, cafes and farms. Students take these roles seriously. They raise funds for different charities and take on jobs around the school. These activities support their independence and self-esteem.
- Equality of opportunity is ensured for all students at the school through the curriculum. The study of different faiths and cultures and regular assemblies ensure that there is no discrimination of any kind.
- All groups of students achieve equally well, including those with additional special needs such as autism spectrum disorders, sensory impairments or physical disabilities. These students benefit from high quality support, and technological and/or communication aids to support their individual needs.
- The school's safeguarding procedures are rigorous and meet current requirements. Leaders have ensured the school's procedures for keeping students safe and secure are meticulous. Staff are very well trained in identifying students at risk of harm and systems are extremely well followed. Risks are carefully assessed when taking students on visits outside of the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is very supportive and helpful. Members provide high quality support and their capacity to

challenge leaders has improved. Following an external review last year, governors have received the appropriate training to challenge leaders very well. They are now fully involved in checking on teaching and behaviour and look carefully at how well students are doing. Members know what is working well and what still needs improving. They stringently hold leaders to account. They have an excellent range of skills and understand the special educational needs of students. They use these skills to the benefit of the school. Governors receive regular reports about students' progress; they understand the school's data and compare it with other similar schools. Frequent checks and headteacher reports enable them to have an accurate view about the school's effectiveness. Excellent management of finances means that additional funding is used very well to improve the learning of those students who are eligible to receive it so that they achieve at least as well as their classmates, and sometimes better. Members ensure that teachers and staff who perform well are rewarded. They fully understand the process of setting targets for teachers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. This is evident in all areas of the school, including those attending alternative provision. School documentation is very thorough and any incidents are recorded in detail with clear information about actions taken.
- Students' attitudes to learning are highly positive and are the result of consistent approaches to behaviour management and very effective learning experiences for all groups.
- Students, staff and parents are highly positive about students' behaviour. Students' excellent behaviour is promoted by strong relationships with staff and between students. There is evidence of some marked improvements in behaviour over time for individual students. Students say that they really enjoy school. Exclusions are very rare.
- Students fully understand the different forms of bullying. Several groups of students told the inspectors that there is no bullying or teasing that they know of. Staff and parents agree. Inspection findings agree with the students' view that behaviour is outstanding.
- Students' personal development is highly promoted through the positive support that they receive and the exciting activities they experience at school. The Bronze and Silver Duke of Edinburgh awards, for example, engage students very well and support their independence and resilience.
- Highly effective provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students includes excellent quality links with other schools. Students understand right and wrong and there is a balanced approach to students' broadly Christian religious education which encompasses world faiths. This was very clear in assemblies.
- Students' attendance usually improves rapidly once at the school. Attendance has been rising year on year and is now well above the attendance of students in other special schools nationally.
- Students are prepared exceptionally well for their lives after leaving school through their outstanding progress and the range of qualifications that they gain. The very effective focus placed on improving their personal skills ensures that most have the confidence to take on challenges and look forward to their futures.
- Students in the sixth form behave outstandingly well in lessons and in their free time and set an excellent example for all other students.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. The school has comprehensive policies, strategies and procedures to ensure the welfare and safeguarding of students. These ensure that all students are kept exceptionally safe.
- Safety skills are given a high priority at the school, ensuring that each student has full understanding of risk and knows how to deal with it. For example, students were observed making pizzas, undertaking all aspects of the work from making the pizza base to washing up their tools. Activities such as this are preparing students extremely well for their futures. Students are very aware of personal risk and understand the importance of internet safety.
- Those in the sixth form are exceptionally safe and secure in their accommodation and at their alternative accommodation. They know about staying safe in the community and have an excellent understanding of their own personal needs.
- Exceptionally detailed risk assessments ensure that all students' individual needs are fully taken into

account for any activity in the school or on any visits.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The overall quality of teaching in the school is outstanding. Because of this, students make outstanding progress in most subjects, including English and mathematics. School records show that teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection because of high quality training and rigorous checks by leaders.
- Outstanding teaching enables all groups of students to make excellent progress. Expectations in lessons are high, ensuring that students deepen their knowledge in many different subjects and make excellent gains in their key skills, such as in literacy and numeracy.
- In Year 10 for example, students were able to reflect very effectively in their English lesson on 'the American Dream' as they discussed why this was important. Students showed exceptionally high empathy and understanding because of excellent support and very well planned tasks.
- Reading, writing and mathematics are taught exceptionally well across the school. Additional support is readily available for any student who requires it. Students make outstanding progress in all aspects of learning because of the very strong focus on literacy and numeracy in many other subjects. Staff's high level of expertise in literacy and numeracy has a very positive impact on the achievement of individual students.
- Staff check students' work thoroughly and carefully, giving clear examples of how students can improve their skills. This is particularly a strength in English and mathematics lessons. Homework is regularly planned for.
- Students with additional needs benefit from high quality, regular support from teaching assistants who ensure that students fully understand how to complete their tasks and know what is expected of them. As a result these students make the same excellent progress as their classmates.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students' attainment on entry is usually below and sometimes well below the level expected for their age. This is because of their special educational needs and also because of some past underachievement and non-attendance. However, once at the school they very quickly begin to catch up. Their progress rapidly increases across year groups in a wide range of subjects.
- Evidence from students' books and from the school's own records shows that the vast majority of students make rapid and sustained progress and achieve outstandingly well at the school. This is because learning across Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, in all subjects, is very well matched to their needs and abilities. As a result a very high proportion of students make better than expected progress in English and mathematics.
- Sixth form students achieve outstandingly well in their alternative provision acquiring vocational qualifications that will support them extremely well in their futures.
- Students' achievements in their GCSE examinations show their outstanding progress from their low starting points with all entrants attaining passes in English and mathematics at grades A* to G. Students make excellent progress in art with some students attaining high GCSE grades in the subject. There are no early entries to examinations.
- All groups of students achieve equally well. This includes disadvantaged students who receive additional funding, those who have additional sensory or physical difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders and those from different ethnic backgrounds.
- The vast majority of students achieve outstandingly well by the end of Key Stage 4, from their low, and sometimes very low, starting points. Students do not achieve outcomes that are as high as those in mainstream schools of a similar age because of their low, and often very low, starts in Year 7. Given these low starting points, they make exceptional progress by Year 11.
- Students make outstanding progress across a range of subjects. They achieve exceptionally well in art and design, benefiting from excellent teaching and resources. They also make outstanding progress in history, enjoying visits to museums and places of interest.
- Disadvantaged students in receipt of additional funding achieve as well as their classmates in English and mathematics, and sometimes better. This is because of the very effective use of resources and support provided for these students through the additional government funding.

- Students with additional special educational needs receive effective support to enable them to work alongside their classmates. They make outstanding progress because of the additional expertise provided for them. For example, students benefit from working individually with staff to improve their reading, writing and mathematics skills.
- The most able students benefit from very high expectations and the excellent subject knowledge of staff. This means they are constantly challenged to improve further and achieve extremely well.
- Students' speaking and listening skills are very well developed because of the many opportunities provided for them to speak aloud in class, present their work and talk about their learning. The vast majority have opinions about their futures and about the school. They enjoy sharing these with others.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The sixth form is outstanding. Leaders have an accurate view of the sixth form and ensure that students' progress is excellent. Outstanding teaching takes high quality account of the students' ages and abilities so that they can support them to achieve their next steps in learning.
- A few students enter the sixth form from other schools. They quickly settle and become part of the group. In discussion with inspectors, sixth form students said that they are proud and pleased to be in the sixth form. Several said they had been supported to find part-time employment at local facilities and businesses such as the golf club, the butcher's and the paper shop.
- Students all have the opportunity to take Duke of Edinburgh awards and undertake volunteering. Sixth formers work very hard and the vast majority complete their work-related qualifications. They told inspectors that their parents think the sixth form is 'fantastic', and they agree with them.
- Students say that the staff are fair. They believe they have all grown in independence since joining the school. They all agree that bullying is extremely rare and dealt with straight away.
- All students speak strongly about the school's approach to e-safety, racism and homophobia. Students convey high levels of maturity in their views.
- Students are very well prepared for the next stage of their education and employment because their courses and qualifications match their needs and abilities exceptionally well.
- Relationships between students and staff are excellent. Staff are proud of their students and keen for them to do well. Students are extremely well supported in lessons and in their free time. They know that there is always someone to talk to.
- The sixth form curriculum ensures that students have excellent opportunities to learn about the wider world and to gain confidence in managing their special needs. They have regular trips into the local area and wider afield.
- Achievement in English and mathematics is outstanding because of the high focus placed on these areas. As a result all students leave the sixth form with qualifications that will support them in the future. They make excellent progress and all go on to college courses or into employment when they leave the school. There have been no examples of students leaving without future placements in the past two years.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding and they thoroughly enjoy their sixth form experience. They say that they feel very safe when they are out and about in the community and on their various work placements. They have a very strong awareness of personal risk and know how to minimise this because these issues are discussed thoroughly with them.
- Leadership of the sixth form is outstanding because the curriculum is extremely well matched to students' specialist needs and provides an exciting range of courses for students. Opportunities to learn about the wider world are very good, preparing them exceptionally well for their futures.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	110579
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	448983

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

Type of school	Special
School Category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	169
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	46
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Pounce
Headteacher	Pauline Dichler
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 November 2012
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