

Sydenham School

Dartmouth Road, London SE26 4RD

Inspection dates 18–19 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- It is a lively and welcoming place where students are keen to learn. In the words of the school motto, they are strongly encouraged to 'Aim High'.
- The headteacher and leadership team are relentless in their drive to make sure that the school provides a high quality all-round education for all. They are strongly supported by an outstanding governing body.
- Students make at least good and sometimes outstanding progress. Overall, standards by the end of Year 11 are above average.
- The sixth form is good. Students develop into mature and confident young people who are well prepared for their adult lives. The vast majority go on to higher education.
- Students at risk of falling behind are quickly identified and receive good support, as do those entitled to support through the pupil premium. The gap between their attainment and that of other students is closing very rapidly.
- Teaching is good. Teachers make lessons enjoyable and challenging. Their knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects are very evident.
- Parents strongly support the school and appreciate what it offers to their children.
- Students' positive attitudes are reflected in good attendance and behaviour. They are willing to take on responsibilities and make a contribution to the school and wider community
- Creative and performing arts make a strong contribution to students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough of the teaching is outstanding and a minority of lessons require improvement.
- Students do not achieve equally well in all subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons or part lessons, including eight observed jointly with school staff.
- Meetings were held with the school council and three other groups of students; a representative from the local authority; the Chair and five other members of the Governing Body; and a range of staff, including senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors looked the school’s records of students’ attainment and progress, behaviour and safety and attendance. They also looked at documents related to the monitoring of teaching and learning, as well as safeguarding documents and other school policies.
- Inspectors reviewed 67 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as two letters and an email received during the inspection and met one parent who had requested a meeting with an inspector. They also considered the school’s own surveys of parental and staff opinion.

Inspection team

Grace Marriott, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Hugh Betterton	Additional Inspector
Heidi Boreham	Additional Inspector
Patricia MacLachlan	Additional Inspector
Stephen Williams	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Sydenham is a larger than average secondary school with science and mathematics as its specialisms. It shares sixth form provision with Forest Hill School for Boys. A few students spend one day a week attending Lewisham College as part of their vocational course.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is broadly average as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is higher than average. This is additional support for looked-after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils with a parent in the armed services.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is high. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is also above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The headteacher has been appointed since the previous inspection. She has been in post for five terms. There have also been some recent changes to the leadership team.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eliminate differences in achievement between subjects and raise all teaching to the level of the outstanding, by ensuring that all teachers
 - question students and check their understanding more effectively to help them apply their knowledge and understanding in greater breadth and depth
 - use written feedback to encourage a dialogue with students and make sure that they are clear about exactly what they need to do to achieve their targets.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most students join the school with knowledge and skills broadly in line with expectations for their age. Students make good progress over time and, as a result, GCSE results are above the national average.
- Most parents rightly think that their children are making good progress. There is relatively little difference in the rate of progress of different groups. For example, disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with other students, as do students with English as an additional language and those from minority ethnic groups. These groups also achieve better results than similar students nationally. Similarly, students with the potential to be high attainers are well-supported by a specialist programme.
- Highly effective use of the pupil premium through, for example, mentoring, additional support, homework clubs and access to information and communication technology facilities is helping these students entitled to support from this funding to make rapid progress. They are now achieving about half a grade lower at GCSE than their peer group in both English and mathematics. This is a significant improvement on previous years, when the gap could be as much as two grades. These students are also doing much better than similar pupils nationally.
- In English and mathematics, students make consistently good progress and the proportion achieving an A* to C grade at GCSE in both subjects has increased significantly since the previous inspection as has the proportion obtaining A* and A grades. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at A*-C, including English and mathematics, has also increased.
- Students have many opportunities to use their literacy and numeracy skills successfully across the curriculum. In an outstanding science lesson, Year 10 students used their literacy skills well to present to other students their findings on the function of the pancreas.
- At GCSE, though students achieve well overall, there are some variations between subjects. Students do particularly well in English, mathematics, science and art. They have been less successful in geography and design and technology. The action being taken to improve the weaker subjects is proving effective.
- In the past, students join the sixth form with lower GCSE results than seen in many schools. Sixth form students make good progress and the overall pass rate is well in line with the national average. However, fewer students than average achieve the highest grades and, as at GCSE, there are similar variations between subjects.
- The school enters all students for GCSE English and mathematics examinations in Year 10 and they have the opportunity to improve their grades in Year 11. The school evidence shows that a very high proportion of students are successful in doing this.

The quality of teaching is good

- The majority of teaching is good and an increasing amount is outstanding. Students make good progress because most teachers understand their individual needs and plan their lessons accordingly. In an outstanding history lesson in Year 11, the lesson was very skilfully structured to build students' confidence and ability to evaluate source material. Students responded very well to this approach.
- Teachers manage behaviour very well and create a purposeful working atmosphere in lessons. Relationships are good and students respond well to the range of interesting activities planned. They appreciate their teachers' expertise and subject knowledge and clearly enjoy learning.
- Teaching assistants are well deployed and play a key role in helping students who find learning more difficult, or who are at an early stage of learning English, to achieve at least as well as other students. Teaching assistants have a good understanding of what is required to help individual students overcome any barriers to learning and make progress. Students who may

need extra help with English and mathematics receive highly effective additional support in class or in small groups.

- The staff have improved the quality of marking and assessment since the last inspection and the impact of this is seen in higher standards. All teachers have detailed knowledge of students' progress and attainment. Where teaching is outstanding, teachers use their questioning and marking highly effectively to promote a dialogue with their students. This helps them to achieve their targets. In an outstanding art lesson in Year 8, the quality of the questioning and assessment during the lesson enabled students to make outstanding progress in technical skills and understanding.
- High quality marking and effective questioning are not yet consistent in all lessons. Teachers generally have high expectations but their questioning and their feedback do not always ensure that students can acquire both the depth and breadth of knowledge and skills that they need to achieve at the highest levels. Though students could talk knowledgeably about what they were doing and how much progress they had made, in some lessons the guidance on how to achieve their targets was not precise enough. Sometimes, the teachers' explanations and feedback were not clear enough.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The school has high expectations for behaviour and students respond well, showing that they can take responsibility for their own behaviour and actions. The good behaviour seen during the inspection was typical.
- Students are positive about school and want to learn. There is little low-level disruption in lessons because most teaching engages their interest and takes account of their specific needs. Their behaviour around the school is good, if occasionally a little over-excited. They are polite to visitors and keen to present a positive view of the school.
- They have many opportunities to contribute to the school life and take part very enthusiastically in a wide range of sporting, artistic and cultural activities as well as supporting a number of charities.
- Sixth form students say that the school had improved in recent years. They were particularly appreciative of the support and guidance they receive and the encouragement to go on to higher and further education.
- Students have a very clear understanding of different forms of bullying, particularly cyber-bullying. They told inspectors that bullying is unusual and that they are confident that it is dealt with effectively. They feel safe in school.
- The school keeps detailed records of behaviour and attendance and works very effectively with any students whose behaviour or attendance give cause for concern.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed well through a range of subjects and activities in science, technology and mathematics as well as in the creative and performing arts, which help to extend learning, widen students' horizons and raise their aspirations.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher's high levels of drive and enthusiasm are bringing about rapid improvement. Working closely with leaders at all levels, she is building well on the school's strengths, and systematically tackling its weaknesses.
- The leadership team is completely focused on raising the quality of achievement and provision to outstanding. Precise and very accurate self-evaluation results in action that is sharply focused on what is needed to move the school forward. The impact of this can be seen in faster progress and better results for students, particularly those groups who have not previously achieved well.
- The leadership team are particularly well supported by pastoral and subject leaders who share their vision for the school and are very clear about what is needed to maintain the school's

improvement. Consequently, the school has outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

- Very rigorous monitoring of teaching is increasing the proportion of good or better teaching and is rapidly reducing the amount of teaching which requires improvement. Inadequate teaching has been virtually eliminated. The joint observations with the inspection team showed that the leadership team are precise and accurate in their judgements of the quality of teaching.
- Staff know that they are held to account for the quality of their work and understand that progression up the salary scale and promotion are influenced by the extent to which they meet performance management targets. They also know that they will be supported by well-targeted and effective professional development. Monitoring and support in subjects where performance is weaker are resulting in significant improvement in these areas.
- The school strongly promotes equality of opportunity. It uses the subject specialisms very effectively to promote high achievement and encourage girls' interest in science, technology, mathematics and engineering.
- The school meets all statutory requirements for safeguarding.
- The 'Parent View' questionnaire returns showed good levels of satisfaction with the school and several parents made a point of praising the school's arrangements for transition from Year 6 to Year 7, which had enabled their daughters to settle quickly and happily.
- The local authority provides effective strategic support to help improve students' achievement and for aspects of leadership and management.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors provide high quality strategic thinking in partnership with the headteacher. Governors are highly effective in supporting the leadership team and holding them to account. They know where there are still weaknesses and are prepared to take difficult decisions, for example in relation to staffing. They use detailed scrutiny of information about students' progress and the quality of teaching to evaluate the impact of decisions and actions. They fully understand the performance management systems and how these relate to salary progression. Governors make sure that the budget is well managed and use funding sensibly to bring about improvement. The pupil premium funding is very well targeted and governors check systematically and thoroughly to ensure it is having the desired effect.

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	100741
Local authority	Lewisham
Inspection number	413418

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1470
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	242
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Charlotte Jones
Headteacher	Carolyn Unsted
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 June 2010
Telephone number	020 8699 6731
Fax number	020 8699 7532
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