

Sandwell Valley School

150 Birmingham Road, West Bromwich, Sandwell, West Midlands B70 6QT

Inspection dates

10–12 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils arrive at Sandwell Valley School having experienced significant challenges. Some international pupils have never experienced formal education, while other pupils have not attended school for considerable time. Teachers work well to plan personalised learning routes to meet the needs of all pupils.
- Leaders have worked hard to establish a safe culture, taking into account difficulties young people have experienced in previous education. Pupils value the school and feel safe.
- The school has established positive relationships with parents and professionals to improve pupils' attendance. However, for a minority of pupils attendance remains low.
- A minority of pupils do not arrive at school on time. The school has strategies in place to address this, and have engaged with outside professionals. However, for some pupils, this does affect a crisp start to the school day.
- Arrangements for governance are effective. Governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have engaged with professionals outside of the organisation to provide additional support and external scrutiny.
- The majority of pupils do well. Often, pupils have had a disrupted education. Starting points for these learners are considerably low. The school does well to ensure that they have the opportunity to catch up. The majority of pupils make good progress and in some cases exceed their target grades.
- Personal development is a strength of the school. Some pupils have never experienced a formal school setting. Staff work hard to form trusting relationships with pupils and support them both academically and socially. Often, this support extends beyond the school gates.
- Pupils behave well. They understand right from wrong and treat their peers and adults with respect. They value their school and their teachers. Pupils say that they feel part of a school community.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the attendance and punctuality of pupils to ensure that they maximise their opportunities to learn by:
 - continuing to engage with external professionals, including the local authority and early help teams, to provide additional support
 - reinforcing with parents the importance of good attendance and punctuality and its impact upon pupil achievement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Leaders and governors know their pupils and their community well. They have created a safe culture where pupils and staff are valued. Leaders recognise the challenges experienced by their pupils in previous education and work hard to deliver positive experiences, both academically and socially. Pupils' abilities are quickly assessed and personalised learning is subsequently planned to meet their individual needs and to re-engage them with learning. This enables pupils to make good progress from their initial starting points.
- Leaders have engaged well with local businesses and have a good understanding of local employment trends. The organisation has created opportunities for pupils to progress into health and social care apprenticeships that may lead to sustainable employment within Sandwell Community Care Trust. This helps them to secure future employment and to work with familiar staff with whom they have built positive relationships.
- Leaders have an accurate view of teaching and learning. This is through rigorous monitoring and regular visits to classes to check on the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. The headteacher sets high expectations and takes swift and effective action to address underperformance. Leaders and governors are ambitious for all pupils.
- Leaders have high expectations of pupils and staff. There are positive relationships between staff and the leadership team. All staff feel part of the school; their work is valued and contributes towards school improvement. Staff value the continual professional development provided by the organisation.
- Leaders plan rich opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally, recognising that pupils have not had wide exposure to such experiences. Learning is enhanced through themed days that include, for example, cultural dancing and customs presented by the international pupils and food from around the world including Italy, Afghanistan, Poland and India. Pupils plan and coordinate the events that parents attend and value. Pupils speak highly of these experiences and look forward to future events. Currently, 15 different languages are spoken within the school. Pupils have learned to say 'hello' in these languages.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils access English, mathematics, science, geography, citizenship and work skills including cookery. Optional GCSE subjects are available, including health and social care and law. The curriculum provides additional opportunities for pupils who wish to learn outside of school hours. Pupils value these additional sessions and attend well.
- The school provides highly effective support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. A specialist team of mentors engages well with previous schools and the local authority to identify pupils' needs. Mentors work effectively with the wider staff team to provide additional support. Leaders and staff regularly review pupils'

progress and share this information with parents. Staff and parents work well together to make sure that pupils make good progress from their initial starting points.

Governance

- The arrangements for governance are effective.
- Governance is newly established. However, governors have a clear understanding of the school and what it needs to do to improve. They secure accountability through rigorous monitoring of school improvement and provide appropriate support to leaders.
- Governors are ambitious for all pupils. They have been pioneering in their work to engage the local community and businesses in order to provide future opportunities for the pupils. Governors recognise the vulnerabilities of the pupils and the need for a wider supporting network as they move into independence.
- Governors engage well with pupils. Pupils are invited to meetings to talk about their ideas for school improvement and to showcase their work.
- Governors have recognised the need for external scrutiny and have engaged effectively with organisations outside of the school to provide this.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy published on its website.
- Leaders and governors have worked hard to establish a culture where pupils feel safe. There is a high level of staff supervision. Pupils know how to raise concerns and are confident that teachers will resolve any problems. Pupils say that they feel safe and they are safe.
- Leaders train staff to identify the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect. Staff take appropriate action to identify pupils who are at risk of exploitation and report concerns promptly. Staff are fully aware of their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Staff are highly vigilant and know their pupils well. As a result, staff act upon any concerns swiftly.
- Leaders have ensured that staff are trained appropriately in identifying pupils who may be at risk of extremism and radicalisation. They are appropriately trained and aware of how to report concerns and access support. They are confident and competent in discussing such risks with pupils. Pupil representatives have also completed this training.
- The curriculum teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe. Personal, social, health and economic education lessons help pupils to understand a range of issues, for example healthy relationships, the potential dangers and risks of using the internet and how to keep safe online. Pupils also learn how to look after themselves and how to make healthy choices through work skills lessons. Staff reinforce this work through daily assemblies that cover anti-bullying themes and how to keep safe on the way to and from school. The school also engages well with local police who have delivered sessions on knife crime, substance awareness and gangs.
- The single central register meets requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The vast majority of pupils arrive at Sandwell Valley School having experienced disruption to their formal learning. Some have not attended school for a considerable amount of time. For some pupils, including international pupils, this is their first experience of education. Teachers have created a warm welcoming environment where pupils feel confident and quickly form trusting relationships.
- The majority of teachers use highly effective questioning skills to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils' responses demonstrate gains in learning and a desire to learn more. Teachers check regularly on pupils' progress and are quick to reshape tasks to ensure that pupils understand what they expect of them. There is a high level of challenge in mathematics. Higher-level thinking and problem-solving is promoted effectively. Pupils are resilient and keen to learn new concepts. Pupils recognise that work is challenging and makes them think in order to deepen their understanding.
- The teaching of health and social care education is a particular strength. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and use highly effective questioning to encourage group discussions and promote higher-level thinking. Many pupils are interested in health and social care careers and the school prepares pupils well for future careers within the sector. The organisation has created opportunities for pupils to continue into apprenticeships that will enable them to participate in work-based learning in other areas of the business.
- In science, teaching engages pupils well. For example, pupils learn about reaction times and carefully consider variables and the external factors that may affect the results of their experiments. Pupils use secure knowledge to identify potential changes in results and check this with retests.
- International pupils benefit from highly effective and well-planned English lessons. Teaching staff demonstrate secure subject knowledge and promote speaking, listening, reading and writing well. They have created a safe learning environment where pupils are happy to share ideas and help one another. Pupils have regular opportunities to practise new words and phrases. This reinforces their learning well.
- The majority of pupils engage well in homework and complete tasks to a high standard. They recognise how homework supports their learning and provides opportunities for them to prepare for their examinations.
- Staff support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities well. Staff identify the needs of pupils when they arrive at the school and adopt a whole-school approach to planning pupils' learning.
- Teachers know pupils well and use secure subject knowledge and careful planning to deliver engaging learning opportunities. Staff use information from previous schools and assessments to plan personalised learning programmes. As a result, pupils are engaged and make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Leaders analyse school information rigorously. Staff quickly identify pupils who are at risk of falling behind and put in place additional support to ensure that they catch up.

- Literacy is promoted well throughout the curriculum. Pupils learn key words and technical language. Staff encourage pupils to record new vocabulary. Speaking and listening opportunities are regular through debate, discussion and presentations. Reading for pleasure is used positively to engage pupils who have missed significant amounts of learning. Teachers use what they know about pupils' reading habits to get to know pupils and to build on their interests and hobbies.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school has employed a therapist who delivers sessions on mindfulness, yoga and relaxation. Pupils value this and recognise how it helps them deal with stress and anxiety.
- Attendance for some pupils is low. However, when compared to pupils' attendance in previous education establishments it is a vast improvement. A large number of pupils have never experienced formal education. The school has worked hard with pupils and their families to support and improve attendance. The school has also engaged well with external partners such as the local authority. Although this has led to some improvements, further work is needed.
- Some pupils do not arrive at school on time. For a small minority of pupils, this prevents a crisp start to the school day and means that they miss some important messages in assemblies. This is for a variety of reasons and the school is working hard to address this and to provide additional support for individual children and their families. As a result, pupils' punctuality is improving. However, it is still an area of focus for the school.
- Parents value the school and describe it as 'life-changing' for their children. They say that the staff have provided family support and the school never gives up on pupils.
- Relationships are a key strength of the school. For some pupils, this is their first experience of formal education. Others have not attended school for considerable amounts of time. Staff work hard to build and develop positive relationships built on trust, nurture and support. As a result, staff meet the vast majority of pupils' academic, social and emotional needs.
- Leaders employ a school nurse who visits regularly and provides health checks for every pupil. A referral system is also in place to support pupils. The high ratio of staff means that adults are quick to notice any causes for concern and can act upon these quickly.
- Daily assemblies cover a range of themes including safety, cohesion and community awareness. These provide a valuable forum for pupils to engage with their school community and celebrate success.
- The school prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education or employment and training. The vast majority of pupils have moved into further education. Some pupils have returned to their original schools while others have engaged in apprenticeship programmes offered by the organisation. The majority of pupils choose to remain at Sandwell Valley School after completing Year 11.
- The school's work on careers information, advice and guidance is effective. The school has engaged well with local authority partners, who attend school regularly to deliver

impartial advice. All pupils have access to a careers adviser and engage well in focused lessons where they learn how to complete job applications and prepare for interviews. Some pupils have clear ideas on their future career plans and say that school supports them well. This helps them to make appropriate, well-informed decisions.

- The school runs holiday clubs that offer academic and therapeutic sessions for pupils who need additional support. The school recognised that the pupils in the local community would benefit from this. These sessions are well attended.
- The school has a robust system for managing complaints. Pupils say that they are listened to and that staff are approachable and friendly. Pupils say that they would not change anything about their school. They have no concerns and feel that staff treat them with respect. They say that the school feels like a family.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils have helped to design a newly established rewards system. Although in its infancy, pupils can explain the system and say teachers use it fairly. Teachers use the system well to promote high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils say that staff apply the behaviour policy consistently and that behaviour is good.
- Incidents of negative behaviour are extremely rare. Pupils have confidence that staff resolve any issues quickly. They say that they are treated like adults and work with staff and others to mediate if any problems arise. School records are maintained well and reflect that poor behaviour is indeed rare. Pupils are aware of different types of bullying and say that any incidents are taken seriously and addressed quickly.
- The school believes in giving pupils second chances. Pupils recognise this and appreciate that the school does not give up on them. If incidents occur, the school is quick to engage with parents and professionals to support pupils. There is a culture of praise and recognition to reinforce and reward positive behaviour. This system has enabled pupils to build and sustain positive trusting relationships with adults.
- The lead staff for pastoral and behaviour support have a good understanding of the pupils and their circumstances. They work closely with parents and carers to provide additional support should this be needed. They recognise the anxieties of pupils and engage well with the mentor team and the therapist to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Parents value this additional support and recognise that it has had a positive effect on their children.
- Pupils mix in diverse groups. They show tolerance and respect for one another and for adults. The school has worked hard to create a culture based on tolerance and celebration of differences. Pupils enjoy learning about different cultures and welcome newcomers to their school community positively. They respond quickly to adult requests and value the opinions of others. They are polite and helpful.
- Pupils behave well both in lessons and around the school environment. Behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes is positive. Pupils show respect for one another and staff. They take pride in their work and their surroundings. Their good conduct reflects the high expectations of the school. The school has worked hard and effectively to create a culture of respect and tolerance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The vast majority of pupils start at the school having had a hugely disrupted education. Some pupils start at Sandwell Valley School in Year 11. The school's information also shows that a significant number of international pupils have never experienced formal education. Teachers use information from previous schools and assess pupils when they arrive at the school. Pupils in all groups make good progress from their initial starting points, which are often below those typical for their age.
- Teachers work effectively with all pupils to plan personalised learning programmes that help them revise and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. Staff provide additional sessions for pupils that they appreciate and attend regularly. This has resulted in positive outcomes for pupils who have achieved GCSEs across a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. Pupils catch up quickly and make rapid progress.
- The school has strong provision for pupils learning English as an additional language. Leaders and staff engage well with a variety of community partners to provide a wide range of support services to pupils and families. The school has a strong basis for delivering languages. Pupils can take GCSEs and equivalent qualifications in French, Italian, Panjabi and Urdu.
- The work in pupils' books shows that they make good progress over time in a range of subjects. In mathematics, pupils develop their ability to solve challenging problems well. In English, work shows that pupils are increasingly able to comprehend, and use, sophisticated language fluently. The school assesses pupils' progress half-termly in all subject areas. The school's information shows that pupils achieve or, in some cases, exceed their expected targets. In history and citizenship, progress is slower than other areas of the curriculum. However, leaders have addressed this and improvements in outcomes in these subject areas are evident.
- The school's assessment information is accurate. Regular moderation takes place through the governing body supported by other schools to ensure that awarded grades are valid. The school have also engaged with external quality advisers to provide additional scrutiny.
- The school promotes pupils' holistic development well. Pupils appreciate the opportunity to engage in and make good progress in life-skills sessions, where they learn how to look after themselves and prepare for independent living.
- Leaders analyse pupil information with rigour. Staff quickly identify and support any pupils who are at risk of falling behind. The mentoring team put in place extra catch-up sessions. Assessment information and the work in pupils' books shows that this high level of nurture and support is highly effective and helps pupils to make good progress.
- Parents speak highly of the school and recognise that their children do well. They say that the school is fantastic and helps their children to get good GCSE grades. Parents recognise that teachers, 'do their best to make their children academically successful'. As a result, all of the parents who spoke to inspectors would recommend the school to others.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The provision for sixth-form students is good. The 16 to 19 study programme meets requirements.
- The current sixth form includes previous Year 11 pupils who opted to return to improve their GCSE examination grades. These pupils chose to remain at the school, having forged positive relationships with staff. Sixth-form students say that they feel part of a community and spoke enthusiastically about a forthcoming opportunity to attend a debating workshop at Cambridge University. Students recognise that they would not have had the skills to do this before coming to the school.
- Sixth-form students are ambassadors for the school. Some have been elected as student representatives who attend regular meetings with the headteacher and board of governors to make suggestions for school improvement. They say that staff listen to their views. For example, they said that improvements to the school's rewards system have been made following student feedback. Students take this role seriously and are proud to be part of the school.
- Sixth-form students are also able to access optional GCSEs in health and social care and law. The Sandwell Community Caring Trust has created opportunities for leavers to move into apprenticeships within the care division of the organisation. Students receive impartial careers advice and guidance, which enables them to make appropriate and informed career choices. They also have the opportunity to access work experience.
- Mentoring and therapeutic input continues for sixth-form students, providing them with social and emotional support as they prepare for their next steps in education or employment and training and independent living.

School details

Unique reference number	143038
DfE registration number	333/6011
Inspection number	10033587

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	68
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	15
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	The Sandwell Community Caring Trust
Chair	Geoff Walker
Headteacher	Mim Hall
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60 per day
Telephone number	0121 679 7522
Website	www.sandwellvalleyschool.org
Email address	mhall@sandwellcct.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Sandwell Valley School provides education and training programmes for vulnerable young people who are unable to access mainstream provision. Pupils are referred to the school by the local authority. The school also offers places to international pupils, some of whom arrive in the United Kingdom having experienced significant trauma. The majority of

pupils have experienced disruption to formal learning. There are currently 15 languages spoken within the school.

- Sandwell Valley School is a part of the Sandwell Community Care Trust Organisation. The Department for Education registered the school in September 2016. This is the school's first standard inspection. The school had a material change inspection in October 2016 following a move to new premises.
- The school caters for a wide range of educational needs, especially in the areas of social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school provides therapeutic support.
- The school has 32 members of staff, who cover teaching, learning support, pastoral roles, mentoring and administrative duties. Some of the staff work part time to provide flexibility for the intake, which is often fluid. Pupils can start at Sandwell Valley School at any point during the school year.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, senior teaching staff and the school's mentors. The inspector also met with the board of governors.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning across all year groups in boys' and girls' classes across a range of subjects, including English, mathematics, science, art and health and social care. The majority of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector examined work in pupils' books across a range of subjects and reviewed the school's assessment information.
- The inspector spoke to pupils about their work, pupils' behaviour, preparation for their future and how they learn to keep themselves safe.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour and the implementation of the school's behaviour policies during both structured learning time and breaktimes.
- The inspector reviewed surveys completed by parents on Parent View.
- During the inspection, a number of documents and policies were examined. These included safeguarding policies, the school's development plan and the school's assessment information. Records on pupils' behaviour and attendance and the admissions register were also reviewed.

Inspection team

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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