

Inspection of Stowmarket High School

Onehouse Road, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1QR

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| Inspection dates: | 10 and 11 June 2025 |
| The quality of education | Good |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Previous inspection grade | Requires improvement |

The headteacher of this school is Lucie Hernandez. This school is part of Kingfisher Schools Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Craig Morrison, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Neil Collins.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at Stowmarket High School. They are well cared for. Pupils feel confident to talk to staff if they have a worry or concern. Pupils are respectful to each other and to staff. Relationships are strong and pupils understand the importance of being kind and respecting others. Pupils report that they are confident to be themselves.

Pupils know what is expected of them and respond well to the school's high expectations of behaviour and academic achievement. Lessons are calm and learning is seldom disrupted. Poor behaviour is not a concern for pupils. They concentrate in lessons and work diligently. Pupils know that their teachers will explain tasks clearly and help them to complete activities.

Pupils conduct themselves well around the school site. There are clear routines from the moment pupils arrive at school in the morning and throughout the day. Pupils are courteous to visitors and staff. Their behaviour ensures that there is a pleasant atmosphere around the school.

Pupils have the opportunity to attend a wide variety of clubs, take part in school performances and go on a range of local, national and international trips and visits. Pupils are given information about further education, apprenticeships and careers. This prepares them well for their next steps in the wider world.

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

The school has changed how the curriculum is designed and how it is taught. This helps pupils build on what they have learned before. Teachers benefit from high-quality training. This helps them to teach more effectively. Teachers use their expertise to help pupils to remember what they have learned. They explain new learning clearly, work with pupils to make sure they understand and give opportunities for pupils to show what they have learned. However, on occasion, key knowledge is not taught with enough precision. Some pupils do not achieve as well as they could as a result. They struggle to make links with prior learning to build a depth of understanding.

All pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), access the full range of subjects. The needs of pupils with SEND are identified quickly and accurately. Teachers adapt how they teach to make sure all pupils can be successful in the learning activities they undertake. Pupils with SEND achieve well from their starting points.

Reading has a central place in lessons and new vocabulary is taught explicitly. The school recognises the importance of pupils being able to read well. The school promptly identifies pupils who need to get better at reading and helps them improve. They quickly become fluent, confident readers. The school promotes reading for pleasure and provides a diverse range of texts to help broaden pupils' view of the world.

The school is very clear about the behaviour it expects from pupils. Pupils know that disruption will not be tolerated. If pupils make poor choices with their behaviour they are given the opportunity to put things right. High attendance is a priority for the school. The school provides robust support for families to ensure that pupils' attendance is strong. This means that attendance is continuing to improve.

The school has comprehensive arrangements to support pupils' personal development. Tutor time, assemblies, lessons and dedicated days allow character development, well-being, culture and planning for the future to be explored thoroughly. For example, pupils learn to look after their physical and mental health, have positive relationships, contribute to the community and keep safe online. Pupils benefit greatly from this programme. The school's strong careers programme is inclusive of all pupils' needs. There is a wide range of clubs, trips and visits. Although many pupils participate, some do not readily take advantage of these opportunities due to the barriers they face.

The school has made rapid improvements since the last inspection due to the intelligent and purposeful actions taken by leaders at all levels. There have been many changes, but staff report that their workload and well-being are carefully considered. There has been a determined focus on improving teachers' knowledge and skills through expert training. This is greatly appreciated by staff and has led to improvements in teaching and achievement. Leaders are ambitious for their school and have shared their strong values with staff, pupils and the community. Parents and carers value and recognise the changes made to the school. They speak positively about how this has impacted their children.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- On occasion, key knowledge is not taught precisely enough. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The school should ensure that teaching supports all pupils to learn key subject knowledge securely.
- Some pupils do not access the wide range of clubs, trips and visits provided by the school. This means that some pupils are not getting the broad and rich experience that the school would like them to have. The school should remove barriers to participation so that more pupils benefit from this offer.

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

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| Unique reference number | 145055 |
| Local authority | Suffolk |
| Inspection number | 10378576 |
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Academy sponsor-led |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 897 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Neil Collins |
| CEO of the trust | Craig Morrison |
| Headteacher | Lucie Hernandez |
| Website | www.stowhigh.com |
| Date of previous inspection | 27 March 2024, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school is part of Kingfisher Schools Trust.
- The school uses four alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the CEO, chair of trustees, chair of the school improvement board (SIB), members of the SIB, other trustees, the headteacher and members of the senior team. Inspectors also contacted representatives from some of the alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into these subjects: art, English, geography, history, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors scrutinised school policies and records and observed the work of the school by visiting classrooms, form time, social spaces and dining spaces.
- Inspectors considered 192 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, 86 responses to the staff survey and 72 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

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|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Carole Herman, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Lynn Ayling | Ofsted Inspector |
| Karen Kerridge | Ofsted Inspector |
| Polly Lankester | Ofsted Inspector |

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