

Sawtry Village Academy

Fen Lane, Sawtry, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE28 5TQ

Inspection dates

10–11 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Outcomes are not yet good. Standards have not improved since the last inspection because too many Year 11 pupils did not make the progress expected in English, mathematics and science in 2015.
- Gaps in the attainment and progress of disadvantaged and other pupils, although narrowing, remain too wide.
- Teaching is not yet good enough. It has taken some teachers too long to accept that mediocre results are due to weaknesses in their teaching.
- Not all middle leaders are driving improvement in the subjects or areas for which they are responsible.
- Expectations of pupils are sometimes too low, particularly at Key Stage 3 where schemes of work and linked assessments lack aspiration for academic excellence.
- On-site alternative provision does not effectively meet the learning needs of the pupils who attend.

The school has the following strengths

- Leadership and management, including governance, have been completely transformed since the last inspection. The inadequacies found at the last inspection have been addressed.
- The Principal has steered the academy's recovery with remarkable determination and assurance.
- The Trust provides excellent strategic leadership and steers improvement through high-quality training, guidance and support.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are well led.
- Learners in the academy sixth form achieve well and are well prepared for the next stage of their education and adult life.
- Pupils are proud of their academy. They behave well and have positive attitudes to learning. They know how to stay safe and are confident that bullying will not be tolerated.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the academy no longer requires special measures.

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards across the curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4, and eradicate any gaps in achievement by:
 - establishing high aspirations of academic excellence and increasing teachers' expectations of what all pupils can achieve
 - reviewing schemes of work, alongside new assessment systems, to ensure that subjects provide suitable challenge to extend pupils' knowledge, deepen their understanding and develop key skills
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils attend as regularly as other pupils, are well taught and get the additional support they need in order to excel
 - improving the on-site alternative provision to ensure that pupils can catch up quickly.
- Improve the quality of teaching and accelerate pupils' learning by:
 - rooting out ponderous teaching
 - sharpening teachers' use of assessment and feedback
 - making better use of work scrutinies and lesson observations to strengthen teaching and learning
 - disseminating more widely the excellent practice that already exists in all facets of teaching and learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The Principal, supported by a cohesive and committed team of senior leaders, has skilfully steered the academy's recovery. Previous mismanagement by senior leaders and governors left the academy in a parlous financial state and without essential management systems to maintain any kind of improvement. In the last 18 months, the senior team has worked tirelessly to transform the academy's leadership and management, and put the academy firmly on course to become a sustainably good school.
- From the outset, senior leaders have prioritised sensibly, first by establishing robust management systems to ensure the safety and well-being of all pupils, and then implementing reviews to evaluate the quality of provision and plan improvement. It has taken time to define leadership responsibilities that did not exist previously, to restructure management roles and to establish clear lines of accountability. Performance management of staff is rigorous, self-evaluation is accurate and improvement planning is good.
- Leaders have done a remarkable job, on a limited budget, to successfully create a much more welcoming and conducive environment for learning, after years of neglect. Public spaces have had a much-needed coat of paint and some new carpet, and the academy has made the best of its least-suitable and most-neglected accommodation, such as in the sixth form centre. The recent investment in information technology resources has been much needed and long overdue.
- Senior leaders are tackling an entrenched culture of isolation and independence, and it has taken time for some teachers to accept that mediocre results are the consequence of their own uninspiring teaching. The 'open door' policy for classrooms is a positive development, and helps to share good practice. Despite having to work hard, teachers are accepting constructive evaluation and support, and staff morale is remarkably positive. New teachers, in particular, feel very well supported.
- Leadership of teaching and learning is good. Leaders evaluate the quality of teaching accurately and use this to target additional support for individuals, and carry out a systematic performance management process that rewards the most effective teaching.
- Teachers have access to high-quality training and are able to communicate with staff across other academies in the Trust, enabling staff to share ideas and plan joint trips and usefully check the reliability of one another's assessments. Evaluations of this training and support are overwhelmingly positive.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have had to establish rigorous procedures for checking the academy's work, including compliance with all statutory requirements, evaluating the quality of provision and planning improvement. All of these systems are now in place, but senior and middle leaders are still learning how to use them to drive rapid improvement. Reviews of pupils' work, for example, check teachers' marking but do not evaluate the quality of schemes of work or whether pupils are given suitable levels of challenge.
- Developing the leadership roles of middle managers has taken time, particularly as some posts or post holders are new. Subject leaders and heads of house have embraced their new responsibilities, but not all are using assessment information and routine checks to identify issues and effectively drive improvement.
- The branding of the academy into five 'houses', including one for the sixth form, has given pupils a stronger sense of community, and has established clearer accountability among staff for pupils' welfare and achievement. Procedures for tracking the attendance, behaviour and progress of individual pupils in this new system are efficient and effective.
- The appointment of a pupil premium champion has given suitably high priority to improving provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils (those eligible for pupil premium funding). It is too early to see significant impact of this work because procedures for tracking pupil progress are not yet sufficiently rigorous. This is also the case for provision and outcomes for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, which is also under new leadership.
- The curriculum gives pupils suitable breadth and balance in their learning. It is well supported by a range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, including those offered as 'session six' at the end of the day. In addition, a number of activities are offered through the house system. During the inspection, dozens of pupils enjoyed locking horns in a quick-fire inter-house chess competition.
- Leaders have delayed adopting a new approach to assessing pupils' learning and progress, waiting instead for an agreed Trust-wide model to develop. This has hampered attempts to raise standards, particularly at Key Stage 3, where some unambitious schemes of work are rooted in weak assessment.
- The academy effectively promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' personal attributes, including British values, are well promoted through assemblies and the curriculum,

specifically evident in ethics lessons and core studies, and also in the 'Pledges' and are modelled by adults. Pupils are considerate of others, reflective about important contemporary issues and are intolerant of discrimination in all of its forms.

- A small number of parents have responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, since the start of term. Their mixed views reflect the turbulence that the academy has experienced over the last year. A significant proportion of parents say that they would not recommend the academy.
- Leaders have sensibly prioritised pupils' safety and well-being by developing alternative provision on site for pupils who might otherwise not attend mainstream education. Although this meets the pupils' welfare and personal development needs, it does not yet meet their academic needs well enough to close crucial gaps in their learning.
- **The governance of the academy**
 - Since April, the Trust has bolstered leadership and accelerated the academy's transformation by providing strong strategic direction and high-quality support and guidance.
 - Governance has been completely overhauled so that governors now fulfil all their statutory responsibilities, hold leaders to account and are central to the drive for improvement.
 - Governance responsibilities are suitably delegated so there is careful oversight of the finances and the performance of staff.
 - Governors are very well informed and provide support and challenge to senior leaders in appropriate measure.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The academy is rigorous in implementing all mandatory checks and follows all guidance with regard to safer recruitment and child protection. Staff training is comprehensive and covers a wide range of risks. All staff have undertaken the government's 'Prevent' training which focuses on tackling extremism. The academy takes a proportionate approach to making risk assessments without compromising pupils' safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching is strengthening, but is too variable to be judged good. Inadequate teaching has been eradicated, but too many teachers have been slow to address weaknesses because they have not perceived their teaching as needing to improve.
- Teachers' expectations of the quality, quantity and presentation of pupils' work are not consistently high. Teachers do not always use prior attainment information to set suitably difficult work, even when they take care to plan different tasks for different groups of pupils. This means that pupils sometimes either do work they have done before, for example in primary school, or do repetitively low-level tasks that do not stretch them.
- Some aspects of teaching are excellent, including in the sixth form, and many are good. The most effective teaching maintains a good pace because the best teachers skilfully ensure, either through their questioning or with the way that activities are set up, that every pupil is involved, from start to finish. High-quality learning is often reflected by well-focused discussion between pupils, and pupils asking as well as answering questions.
- Strategies to strengthen teaching are having a positive impact on the overall quality of teaching and learning. Lessons are well prepared, often with interesting resources to support pupils' learning. Teachers ensure that lessons get off to a brisk start and that pupils are expected to engage actively in learning, rather than listening to teachers for too long.
- Most teachers follow the expectations set out in the academy's marking policy. In general, marking supports pupils' learning well, with many teachers giving feedback on 'what went well' and how pupils' work would be 'even better if', to encourage pupils and raise their expectations. However, generic comments such as 'add more detail' are unhelpful, and do not give pupils a clear enough steer on how to achieve excellence. The academy is still using National Curriculum levels which, in some subjects, are suppressing rather than accelerating pupils' learning and progress.
- The academy now makes much better alternative provision for pupils who are struggling to cope with mainstream education. External provision at the local colleges is closely monitored to check pupils' well-being and progress. However, work in the on-site alternative provision is not adequately matched to the learning needs of individual pupils, even though there are only a few pupils to teach.
- The academy provides a 'session six', at the end of each day, to give pupils additional support and

enrichment opportunities. Pupils really appreciate the specialist guidance they can access in these sessions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The academy's open culture supports all aspects of pupils' well-being, including their emotional and physical welfare. Pupils are well known by staff, and trust that they can turn to an adult if they have worries or concerns.
- Prior to the last inspection, bullying tended to go unnoticed or unreported, and was consequently under the radar of staff and senior leaders. This is no longer the case because pupils' well-being is regarded as the academy's number-one priority. Importantly, there is an open dialogue about bullying, so that incidents are quickly reported and immediately nipped in the bud.
- Pupils of all ages say that they feel completely safe in school and that bullying is rare. This is supported by the academy's records, which show different types of incidents, and indicate that bullying is now infrequent and is dealt with effectively.
- The high profile of staff, including senior leaders, around the academy contributes to the pupils' confidence and perception that staff care about their welfare. The academy's determination to eliminate bullying is underpinned by the strong promotion of equality of opportunity and valuing pupils' individual qualities.
- The academy has a burgeoning culture of recognising and applauding success, particularly through the house system. High achievement is positively celebrated by displays of work across the academy, such as in the art department and in public spaces. Pupils like the instant recognition they receive for positive behaviour.
- Pupils are well informed about specific dangers, such as those posed online and by misuse of social media, and are aware of the boundaries of acceptable language. Pupils say that teachers do not tolerate the use of inappropriate language in lessons.
- Developing learners' independence has always been a strong feature of sixth-form teaching, but lower down the academy pupils have too often coasted in lessons without working hard. The academy is improving pupils' perseverance, encouraging them to work through problems rather than giving up or asking for help straight away.
- The academy promotes well the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers cover a range of topical issues in tutor time and the academy has a system of pledges that pupils are expected to complete during their time at school. These promote important personal attributes, such as 'leadership', 'service' and 'participation', which contribute to pupils' personal development and employability. In addition, the programme promotes awareness of diversity and pupils' responsibilities in regard to community and environment. Pupils can progress through bronze, silver and gold awards for each pledge.
- Pupils of all ages are encouraged to take on responsibilities, and readily do so. These include house captains, ambassadors, peer mentors and subject representatives. Older pupils understand that they are role models for younger pupils, and speak confidently about the improvements in the academy under its new leadership.
- Pupils have access to impartial careers guidance to make choices about what to do when they leave school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The academy is calm and orderly, both during lessons and at lesson changeover and break and lunchtime. Pupils conduct themselves well, interact sensibly and show respect for one another, as well as adults and visitors.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Lessons start promptly because pupils follow instructions and settle quickly. Pupils work steadily and generally take care with their work.
- There has been a noticeable improvement in pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning since the last inspection, as teaching has improved and expectations have been raised. The new behaviour policy is clear and is understood by pupils. Some pupils, particularly in Years 7 and 8, push the boundaries of

acceptable behaviour by being silly and occasionally disruptive in lessons. Teachers do not all apply the academy's behaviour sanctions consistently when this happens.

- Attendance shows a marked improvement on the same period last year, with gaps in the attendance of different groups of pupils narrowing. Nonetheless, despite sharp improvement, disadvantaged pupils attend less well than others. Student support assistants in each of the houses make daily checks to ensure that pupils attend well and are punctual. Procedures for recognising good attendance and following up absences are swiftly implemented, including for pupils attending off-site provision. This has also contributed to better home-school communication.
- The personal development of pupils who attend alternative provision is closely monitored. There has been a marked increase in the attendance and participation of these pupils, some of whom might not otherwise come to school.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- After rising above the national figure in 2014, the most recent Key Stage 4 results were disappointing. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five A* to C grade GCSEs (including English and mathematics) rose to 62% in 2014, but declined to 53% in 2015. Too many pupils failed to make the progress expected in English and mathematics. Results in science were also weaker than the previous year.
- Gaps in attainment that narrowed in 2014, widened again in 2015, with a wide margin between disadvantaged pupils and their classmates. Girls, once again, did much better than boys.
- Inspection evidence from assessment information, scrutiny of pupils' work and observations of learning confirms the academy's view that progress is accelerating. Predicted results for 2016 are much better than 2015. The current Year 11 pupils are on track to reverse the 2015 dip, with better results overall, and much narrower gaps in the attainment of key groups.
- Academic tutoring is good. In addition, the academy is sensibly implementing intensive intervention and support for pupils who are in danger of underachieving, and this is helping them to catch up. Nonetheless, the academy's assessment information indicates that there are only small gaps in the attainment of different groups of pupils when they start secondary school in Year 7, but that not enough is done in Key Stage 3 to prevent gaps widening. By Year 9, disadvantaged pupils are over-represented in lower-ability groups both in English and mathematics.
- The academy's more comprehensive and reliable assessment information means that teachers are more alert to pupils who are falling behind. As a result, interventions to support these individuals are more swiftly implemented. Leaders can analyse performance 'at the press of a button'. This alone does not solve the problem of underachievement, but teachers are more acutely aware of their specific responsibilities in regard to pupils who fall behind, and the academy is using data effectively to ensure that interventions take place.
- Academy information indicates that all pupils who left Year 11 in August 2014 successfully went on either to further education or into training or employment. The picture for 2015 is also promising.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Learners in the academy's sixth form achieve well. Value-added data from 2014 and 2015 show that, from their starting points at the end of Year 11, learners made good progress overall across their chosen study programmes, including vocational courses and AS and A level subjects. Learners do particularly well in subjects such as English, textiles, media and languages, whereas results in mathematics and science subjects were less impressive this year.
- Learners in the sixth form retake English or mathematics GCSE if they do not already have at least a C grade. Pass rates in these resits are impressive.
- Sixth-form teaching has traditionally been a strength because the academy has been able to deploy teachers with strong subject knowledge. Sixth-form teachers and tutors have extensive experience in teaching this age group, and have established high expectations of what learners will achieve. Consequently, they set suitably ambitious targets for learners so that they expect to achieve well and are stretched in their learning.
- The quality of sixth-form teaching, learning and assessment is good and is carefully monitored. Sixth-form teachers expect learners to engage fully in lessons, and plan activities accordingly that require

preparation and exchange of ideas. There is suitable emphasis on developing learners' independent study skills and self-motivation, so they are well prepared for further study and employment.

- The sixth form has been well led and managed, although leadership of this part of the academy is currently in transition. Leaders have not fully implemented all the expectations of the 16 to 19 study programmes, but learners already have time allocated to charity work at the end of Year 12, and have the opportunity to gain work experience. Plans are in place to extend this more systematically for all current learners.
- Learners are positive about the guidance they receive about their next steps. Visits and visiting speakers focus on a range of options, including employment, apprenticeships and further education. The proportions of learners staying on in Years 12 and 13 are high, as are the numbers who progress into higher education.
- Provision for learners' personal development and welfare is good, and is supported by a well-structured personal development programme. Sixth-form learners are very positive ambassadors for the academy and make a good contribution to the rest of the academy. They attend well and are good role models in terms of their attitudes and behaviour to younger pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	136974
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10005305

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,069
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	168
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Ruddy
Principal	Sarah Wilson
Telephone number	01487 830701
Website	www.sawtryva.org
Email address	office@sawtryva.org
Date of previous inspection	5 June 2014

Information about this school

- Sawtry Village Academy is a larger than average secondary school. The number on roll has declined since the last inspection, reflecting demographic changes in the academy's catchment area and lower recruitment to the sixth form in 2015.
- There have been wholesale changes in leadership and governance since the last inspection, and a significant turnover in staff, particularly in mathematics and science.
- On 1 April 2015, the academy became part of Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust, at which point it changed its name to 'Sawtry Village Academy'.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is broadly average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding (additional government funding to support looked after children or pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The academy makes use of alternative provision for a small number of pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11. Two pupils currently attend Huntingdon Regional College, another goes to Peterborough City College and seven attend the academy's Willow Centre on site.
- The academy meets the government's current floor targets, which set the minimum level expected for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in a series of extended lesson observations and learning walks across more than 35 lessons in order to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff, and groups of pupils. Inspectors also met with representatives of Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust, including the Executive Principal, a trustee and two consultants supporting the academy.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including academy policies, safeguarding documents, school self-evaluation, pupil progress information, attendance data and a wide range of pupils' work.
- An inspector visited the Willow Centre to evaluate on-site alternative provision.
- When the school was last inspected in June 2014 it was judged to require special measures. Inspectors conducted monitoring visits in July and October 2014, and in January and June 2015, to evaluate the academy's progress.

Inspection team

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