

Sawtry Village Academy

Fen Lane, Sawtry, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE28 5TQ

Inspection dates

11–12 January 2018

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires Improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have navigated the school through turbulent times since the previous inspection. Their commitment and clarity of purpose have established the foundations necessary to make good improvements.
- Leaders are rightly focused on increasing the progress made by all pupils, which has worked well to ensure that achievement across the school is rising.
- Senior leaders work closely with the academy council and the trust to provide clear strategic leadership. The challenge and support provided by the academy council and the trust are enabling the school to sustain the improvements made since the previous inspection.
- Middle leaders are well supported, but some lack the clarity that senior leaders possess when evaluating the impact of their work.
- In 2017, Year 11 pupils made above-average progress overall across a broad range of subjects.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving rapidly across a wide range of subjects, and the difference between the progress of disadvantaged and that of other pupils is diminishing.
- A culture of reading regularly and for pleasure is not yet firmly established across the school.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to ensure that pupils remain fully engaged and that learning occurs at an appropriate pace.
- Leaders set staff clear expectations for teaching and learning. When teachers fully embrace these standards, teaching and learning are at their strongest in the school.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. There is a good programme of extra-curricular activities, and educational and other visits to broaden pupils' horizons.
- Parents show strong support for the school. Parents and carers and pupils acknowledge the improvements that have taken place since the previous inspection.
- Attendance overall is improving this year and is now in line with the national average. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities remains below the national average. Sixth-form students have good attendance.
- The sixth form provides an outstanding education. Achievement overall has been significantly above average for the previous two years. Strong teaching and a very supportive pastoral system are enabling students to follow ambitious career pathways.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning by ensuring that all teachers embrace leaders' high expectations for strong teaching and learning across the school.
- Promote a strong culture of reading across the school to strengthen pupils' progress across the curriculum and provide them with an essential tool to widen their knowledge and understanding.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management across the school by supporting middle leaders to evaluate effectively the quality of education in their subject areas, especially the impact of improvement strategies to bring about further improvements.
- Continue to improve attendance to be at least in line with the national average by:
 - embedding strategies across the school to improve attendance overall
 - reducing the absence of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- With the support of the trust, the headteacher has steered the school through a significant time of turbulence. Her appointment came at a time when staff morale and the school's standing in the community were low.
- It is credit to the headteacher and her leadership team that parents, pupils and staff are now positively supporting the school. The high proportion of staff who have remained to work through this challenging period is testament to the new community spirit in the school, which staff are enjoying and appreciate.
- The headteacher and senior leaders are very ambitious for the school. Their commitment and endeavours are evident. They have established a clear sense of direction and focus on improving outcomes for all pupils.
- The school has been on a rapid journey of improvement since the previous inspection. Many positive changes have been made, though the full impact of some initiatives, for example the 'pledges' (an awards system, which offers students a range of character-building opportunities), is not yet evident.
- Leaders have high expectations of staff and pupils, which are changing the culture of the school into one which has high aspirations embedded in it.
- The trust and academy council are providing challenge and support to ensure that the school can build on its recent improvements. There is a strong focus on improving pupils' outcomes and challenging the staff to deliver outstanding teaching and learning.
- The strategic work of the trust and council members led to the school securing additional funding to improve the school buildings, which had shown signs of neglect.
- Middle leaders are becoming more effective and are fully supportive of the direction the school is moving in. Since the previous inspection, there is an expectation that they will be more active in addressing issues within their subject areas. They now play a greater role in the monitoring of teaching and learning. This, together with robust line management, is developing a consistent approach across subject areas.
- Although middle leaders are encouraged to reflect on their practice, some do not evaluate how specific strategies have contributed to the improvement in pupils' outcomes.
- Subject leaders appreciate the collaborative work they engage in with other subject leaders of trust schools. They have, for example, received support with moderation and the development of schemes of work. This has reduced their workload, but more importantly has allowed them to improve the provision in their subject areas.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), who is covering a long-term absence, has brought a significant change to the ethos and practice of how the school supports pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. There is a clear referral system, and comprehensive records exist for each pupil. There is greater communication with pupils' homes, which has contributed to pupils' successes. For example, a school refuser now is a regular attender.

- There is now a strong focus on the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, and this has led to improvements in outcomes, in particular for those pupils with an education, health and care plan. One parent commented, 'My child has many additional needs that are attended to very professionally, promptly and with confidentiality. We have been impressed by the careful consideration given to my child's specific needs.'
- Teachers and pupils reported that pupils' behaviour in the school has improved significantly since the previous inspection, enabling teachers to focus on learning and raising achievement. This, together with raised expectations, has made a significant contribution to the improvements in pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders' work to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of pupils is well developed. Pupils are tolerant and respectful. They have access to a wide range of enrichment activities, such as trips and events, which complement the taught curriculum well and support wider learning.
- Leaders ensure that funding to enable pupils in Year 7 to catch up is used effectively. Clear strategies are in place, including the appointment of an additional member of staff to provide one-to-one tuition for the pupils. The impact of this is clearly evident in the pupils' improved spelling and reading skills.
- Leaders ensure that pupil premium funding is spent effectively. The school has accurately identified the barriers to improvement for disadvantaged pupils. The appointment of a pupil premium champion has raised the profile of the pupils' needs across the school. Teachers now make a point of ensuring that the pupils participate in every lesson. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving rapidly overall.
- Leaders have been active in engaging parents and raising their aspirations. Effective use has been made of social media to improve communication, in particular the recently introduced parent app, which informs parents about their children's weekly activities. Presentations also take place during the year to inform parents how they can support their children.
- Parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, are very supportive of the school. One parent described the school's communication with home as 'superb'.
- The school provides pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils engage well with the curriculum, which is evidenced by the above-average progress they make. This is supplemented by 'period 6' at the end of the school day, when a menu of support sessions and other enrichment activities is provided. These additional activities are appreciated by the pupils. The school encourages participation by providing an additional bus for pupils to use to travel home.
- The school promotes fundamental British values well through assemblies and the tutorial programme. Pupils value what they learn. The school has introduced 'pledges' to embed these values more deeply into the school.
- Pupils are beginning to embrace the 'pledges'; for example, one pupil who attended a local youth group decided to take on a leadership role to allow her to fulfil a pledge. This is precisely the type of decision-making the school is seeking to encourage. The pledges are linked to the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme if pupils wish to pursue that.

- New teachers joining the school, especially newly qualified teachers, appreciate the support provided. They have received relevant training and effective subject mentoring and, as a result, play a full part in the effectiveness of the school.

Governance of the school

- The academy council aided by the trust challenges and supports the headteacher and her leadership team. The council includes parents and receives appropriate information from school leaders about performance and strategic direction, which allows them to ask probing questions.
- The trust provides very effective support at both strategic and operational levels. Leaders from across the trust support and work alongside leaders to drive forward improvements. The trust also provides an educational welfare officer to work at the school one day a week.
- Members of the academy council have received training that has improved their ability to check how well leaders and staff keep pupils safe.
- The academy council is keen that the reputation of the school is enhanced in the local community, following the recent turbulence. It contributes regularly to the local magazine to inform the community of recent developments.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have brought in many changes in the last 18 months that have improved the culture of safeguarding.
- The system for referring concerns about pupils is clear for staff and pupils.
- During the inspection, minor changes were made to the single central record. The school meets statutory requirements.
- Leaders responsible for the arrangements to safeguard pupils have an appropriate level of expertise. They keep accurate records and work effectively with external agencies to support pupils in need.
- Leaders have made sure that child protection and safeguarding training is up to date and in line with statutory requirements, including issues to do with the 'Prevent' duty, which tackles extremism and radicalisation. Regular updates are communicated to staff via morning briefings.
- Pupils involved in alternative off-site provision are well monitored and safeguarding checks are in place. The school communicates regularly with the provider and appropriate records are kept.
- Pupils receive appropriate information on how they can keep themselves safe through assemblies, tutor time and computing lessons.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which is used to plan effective lessons and to adapt questions so they can be targeted at pupils of all abilities.
- Teachers' questioning is helping pupils to engage in lessons and deepen their understanding. Pupils answer questions confidently, which promotes a very positive learning atmosphere.
- Typical of almost all lessons is the positive relationship between staff and pupils, which is encouraging pupils' participation. For example, inspectors observed pupils providing sensitive peer feedback and it being received and responded to.
- Pupils arrive promptly to lessons, ready to learn. Pupils work well in pairs and small groups and participate enthusiastically in practical tasks. Low-level behaviour issues are rare and usually challenged and resolved by teachers, allowing the lesson to focus on pupils' learning and progress.
- Leaders are establishing clear, straightforward expectations for teaching and learning across the school. Most staff embrace these expectations fully, resulting in good pupil engagement, progress and behaviour that support learning.
- Occasionally, aspects of teaching fall below the expectations of the school. Leaders respond quickly to provide a package of support for individual teachers to improve their practice. This has helped to remove inadequate teaching.
- To improve pupils' learning, the school has recently introduced approaches to challenge the passivity of pupils and encourage more resilient, motivated and enthusiastic learners. Most pupils understand the rationale behind this approach, and these strategies are having a growing impact in lessons. For example, in a science lesson inspectors observed pupils asking probing 'why' questions to help deepen their understanding.
- Teachers actively promote literacy, for example reinforcing the understanding of important subject vocabulary.
- Assessment in key stage 3 has developed well since the previous inspection. Baseline tests and termly standardised assessments provide the school with a progress measure for individual pupils. This approach is embedded in the core subjects of English and mathematics, and is now being applied in other subjects.
- The school provides parents with accurate information regarding their children's progress and attitudes to learning. Subject teachers also have the opportunity to add a written comment but do not always do so. Most parents who responded to Parent View, stated that they receive valuable information from the school about their child's progress.
- Leaders have focused on improving the quality and quantity of homework that is set across the school. In the last two years, the quantity of homework has almost doubled. Leaders have also monitored homework to ensure that the quality of homework tasks also improved. This is acknowledged by the older pupils. A large majority of parents who responded to Parent View stated that their child receives an appropriate amount of homework.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pastoral care through the 'house' system is a strength, and pupils reported that they feel safe and well cared for. One parent stated, 'The pastoral care of the school has been excellent and very accommodating of individual needs.'
- Tutor time is based around class groups of pupils from different year groups, although pupils do not consistently choose to mix. There is a robust programme in place, which covers a broad range of issues that pupils will face in modern Britain.
- The assembly and tutor-time programme provide a framework to promote school and British values and have contributed to the low number of racist incidents. Pupils also participate in a termly 'challenge project' to improve their understanding of topical issues, for example recycling.
- The school offers a range of extra-curricular activities including sports and the arts, as well as opportunities to seek extra support from teachers. Pupils enjoy a range of trips, including residential experiences, and the 'pledges' encourage them to contribute actively to the school and local community. The school encourages disadvantaged pupils to participate by subsidising these activities.
- Pupils feel safe at school. Most parents who responded to Parent View said that their children feel safe at school. The school's work to help pupils stay safe is effective.
- There is a strong anti-bullying ethos in the school, which is underpinned by a pastoral programme and an advertising campaign. Pupils stated very strongly that bullying is rare. When bullying does occur, pupils said they are confident that staff would effectively resolve it.
- The school is an inclusive place to learn. Pupils stated strongly that it is 'fine to be different in this school'. Leaders have actively promoted this ethos through assemblies.
- The Willow Group provides a nurturing environment to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Some of the practice with these pupils is exemplary. Parents and pupils spoke very highly of this provision. A personalised curriculum allows pupils to study an appropriate range of subjects while receiving support that will lead to a successful re-integration into the main school. Pupils' improved attitudes to learning and attendance show the success of this approach.
- The pupils who attend alternative provision benefit from a programme tailored to meet their needs. For most pupils, this is having a positive impact on their personal development, and attendance is improving.
- Year 7 pupils stated that moving to Sawtry Village Academy was a positive experience. The school is careful to keep pupils in friendship groups and ensures that pupils are able to adjust to their new surroundings.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite to staff and welcoming to visitors. Their conduct around the school and in lessons is of a good standard. There is an orderly atmosphere across the site.
- Pupils arrive at school on time. They are punctual to lessons and arrive equipped to participate in the learning activities.
- Historically, pupils' attendance has been below the national average but is improving this year. The school is tackling this, using a raft of strategies including access to the support of an educational welfare officer one day a week. School leaders accept that work to improve attendance is at an early stage and needs to be a priority, as the school moves forward, especially for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Approximately half of the pupils travel to school by bus. This is well managed by staff at the end of the school day. Pupils reported that they feel safe on the buses and that behaviour incidents are rare.
- Staff show respect towards the pupils in their care and this is reciprocated. These positive relationships contribute to behaviour in most lessons that is conducive to good learning.
- The school has a clear system for managing behaviour. This year, leaders have raised their expectations of what is expected from pupils in the classroom. Pupils and parents acknowledge this and see it as a positive improvement.
- In the last five years, there has only been one pupil permanently excluded, and fixed-term exclusions are well below the national rate.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' progress overall has improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- Published outcomes in 2017 for Year 11 pupils show that the progress of pupils overall was above the national average across a broad range of subjects including English and mathematics. This was the case for pupils of all abilities, especially those with middle and higher prior attainment.
- The difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of others is diminishing. Inspectors found no discernible difference in the standard of work produced by current disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, while below that of other pupils in the school, shows significant improvement since 2016. It reflects the impact of the strategies supported by the pupil premium funding.
- Current pupils are making good progress and the school's tracking data indicates that the progress of the present Year 11 cohort is continuing an improving trend.
- Overall attainment was above the national average, as was the percentage of pupils achieving a grade 4 in both English and mathematics.

- School leaders are diligent in ensuring that their predictions about pupils' achievements are secure. For example, they participate in both county- and trust-wide moderation exercises and regularly challenge the accuracy of predictions made in the school.
- The renewed emphasis on the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is having a positive impact on their outcomes. Although the school is still developing its progress measures for the pupils, there is clear evidence that the progress of current pupils is improving and Year 7 pupils are making accelerated progress.
- Through discussions with pupils, it is clear that the large majority of pupils do not read frequently and widely. A positive culture of reading does not exist across the school, and this hinders the progress of pupils and limits the breadth of their learning.
- Pupils are well prepared for the decisions about the next stages of their education. There is a structured careers programme from Years 7 to 13, which includes a range of activities to meet the broad spectrum of needs in the school. There are university visits, local college visits, a visit to the National Careers Show, lunchtime drop-in sessions, preparation for a job application, and independent guidance and advice at key events. This work has caused a three-year decline in the number of pupils who leave school after their GCSEs and do not move onto an appropriate educational or employment pathway.
- Pupils with low prior attainment in Year 7 receive additional support through a detailed support plan, and the large majority of the pupils make accelerated progress. One Year 7 pupil improved her reading age by two years during the autumn term. Pupils with low literacy skills benefit from the focused intervention to access the curriculum.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Published outcomes for students show that progress has been significantly above average across a broad range of subjects for two years.
- The leaders of the sixth form, well supported by the senior leadership of the school, have high expectations of what they provide for their students. Students are overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive from the sixth-form team and teachers. The regular feedback they receive is helping students to improve the quality of their work, both for coursework and examination questions.
- When students do fall behind with their studies or show signs of under-performance, the sixth-form team is quick to identify the students and offer a package of support, which is usually successful. The inspectors saw clear evidence of intervention bringing about a significant improvement in the progress of individual students.
- There is a suitably broad choice of subjects available for students to study.
- The retention rate of students moving from Year 12 to 13 is high.
- The attendance of students is high.
- Destinations of leavers reveal how ambitious the students are. A large majority move onto higher education and almost all move onto sustained education, employment or training.
- Students are confident learners and demonstrate high levels of personal, social and employability skills as a result of the personalised programme of activities available

during their studies. These activities include the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, Extended Project Qualification, charity work, art and music projects and the young technician course. There are also leadership opportunities, for example refereeing sports fixtures, chairing the sixth-form council and being a subject ambassador.

- Students benefit from high-quality and impartial careers advice for both higher education and employment pathways. There is a range of activities provided, such as university and industry visits as well as visiting speakers. The sixth-form team supports students in gaining work experience, which has included placements with local and national employers. Students stated that they feel strongly supported in all their choices.
- Rigorous monitoring undertaken by the leaders allows them to have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement for the sixth form.
- When there is underperformance in a subject, leaders respond promptly to devise an appropriate action plan, which is monitored regularly. The improvement of some subjects at A level has been rapid over the last three years, including mathematics.
- Students' concerns are listened to and, where appropriate, acted on to improve their prospects.
- Appropriate provision is made for students to gain a strong pass in GCSE mathematics and/or English. Students benefit from tuition from specialised staff, and a large majority successfully gain the necessary grades.
- Homework is set regularly and students stated that the precise written feedback contributed to their progress over time.

School details

Unique reference number	136974
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10041770

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	907
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	188
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Shirley Jamieson
Headteacher	Sarah Wilson
Telephone number	01487 830701
Website	www.sawtryva.org
Email address	swilson@sawtryva.org
Date of previous inspection	10–11 December 2015

Information about this school

- The school is a larger-than-average-sized secondary school, with a sixth form. The number on roll has declined since the previous inspection.
- Most pupils are White British and the proportion that speaks English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below the national average. The proportion who have an education health and care plan is above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who are known to have been eligible to receive free school meals in the last six years is below the national average.
- A few students are educated off site at alternative provision. This provision includes:
 - Cambridge Regional College
 - Peterborough Regional College, Yaxley Riding Stables
 - Red Balloon Learning Centre.
- The school joined the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust in 2015, at which point it changed its name to Sawtry Village Academy.
- The school meets current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 51 lessons across a range of subjects and year groups. Some of the observations were carried out jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with six groups of pupils and held informal discussions with pupils in lessons and around the school during break and at lunchtimes.
- A wide range of documentary evidence was reviewed, including the whole-school plans for improvement, the self-evaluation document, a range of policies, safeguarding records, attendance, behaviour and exclusion data, assessment information, destination details for leavers, homework records and pupils' performance information.
- The school's single central record of employment checks for staff was checked.
- Meetings were held with governors, the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, subject teachers and representatives of the Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with the organisations the school uses for alternative provision.
- Inspectors spent time observing pupils before school began, at lunchtime, at breaktime and leaving the school at the end of the school day.
- Inspectors took account of the 188 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the comments received via the free-text facility, 68 staff survey responses and 102 pupil questionnaire responses.

Inspection team

David Hutton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Diana Osagie	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Brown	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Kerridge	Ofsted Inspector

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