

Samuel Whitbread Academy

Shefford Road, Clifton, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5QS

Inspection dates

31 October – 1 November 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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- New leadership has halted a decline in the school's overall performance since the previous inspection. The school is improving rapidly because all staff are fully focused on ensuring that pupils make good progress.
- The principal, governors and the trust all share the same vision and high aspirations for the school. They have led by example to secure better teaching, raise achievement and generate further capacity to improve.
- Attainment is consistently above average. A much larger than average proportion of pupils achieve national expectations in GCSE English and mathematics.
- Most pupils make good progress in mathematics and science, and to a lesser extent English. They make less progress in some foundation subjects.
- Differences in the performance of disadvantaged pupils compared to others nationally are diminishing. Leaders recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that improvements are made at a faster rate.
- Teachers forge good relations with pupils and make learning interesting and enjoyable. However, teachers are not consistent in ensuring that pupils work hard enough in lessons to produce high-quality work.
- Most teachers follow the school's agreed policy for marking pupils' books; however, not all of them provide pupils with time to act upon the advice given to them, which the policy requires them to do.
- Behaviour is consistently good. Pupils are polite, pleasant and respectful towards staff and each other. Their enjoyment of school is shown by their regular attendance and participation in a wide range of enrichment activities.
- Parents praise the care and support provided for pupils, particularly for those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- Good leadership of the sixth form ensures that students achieve well and engage fully in school life.
- Governors are professional, knowledgeable and know what needs to be done to improve the school further.
- The trust provides clear, strategic leadership. Expectations of staff and pupils are very high. Senior and middle leaders are held fully accountable for making improvements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further by:
 - ensuring that all teachers make regular checks during lessons to gauge whether pupils are working hard enough and that the quality and quantity of pupils' work meets their expectations
 - in line with school policy, giving pupils time in lessons to follow up on the advice given to them in teacher's marking, to help them improve their work
 - gaining much greater consistency to the quality of teaching, and leadership in a small number of foundation subjects
 - ensuring that revised procedures for monitoring the progress made by disadvantaged pupils become firmly established and enable them to achieve equally as well as others.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Following a period of decline in the school's overall performance, the leadership of the previous academy trust was replaced and renamed the Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST) in 2016. A new principal and a new governing body were appointed to oversee immediate improvements.
- In a short space of time, this new leadership has instigated rapid improvement. It has changed the school's culture and ethos, by raising expectations, setting pupils more aspirational targets and making staff fully accountable for improving the progress made by pupils. Ineffective teaching and weak leadership are no longer tolerated.
- Leaders' self-evaluation shows that they know what the school does well and what needs improving. Improvement plans are suitably prioritised and routinely monitored to gauge the rate of improvements made. The trust makes good use of its most effective lead practitioners in its other schools to support and coach staff, strengthen monitoring arrangements and oversee improvements in the school.
- The principal leads by example and has the full support of his staff and governors. New procedures to manage the performance of staff are applied rigorously and systematically to ensure that pupils receive good-quality teaching, and hold staff to account. Additional support and training is provided to help staff to develop their practice. Tough decisions are made if they are unable to meet the high aspirations of school leaders.
- Leaders demonstrate a thorough understanding of individual pupils' progress. Their systematic monitoring shows which pupils are progressing well, and those who may be at risk of underachieving.
- The new leadership team inherited a range of weaknesses. They have rightly prioritised gaining greater consistency to the quality of teaching, and shifting the emphasis that teachers have placed on pupils' attainment, to the progress that they make from their above average starting points. They have not had sufficient time to improve all aspects of the school's work. They know that teaching and leadership in a small proportion of foundation subjects requires further attention. Plans are in place to improve this further.
- Raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils remains a top priority. Differences in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils compared with others nationally have diminished since the previous inspection. However, leaders acknowledge that the overall rate of improvement has been too slow. They know the reasons for this. They have revised their spending plans this year to ensure that pupils receive the support they need, and leaders are held fully accountable for accelerating their progress.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and is enhanced well by a wide range of enrichment activities in sport, music and the arts. An 'engaging minds' curriculum in Year 9 promotes pupils' wider understanding of current affairs, British values and the risks of radicalisation and extremism. All pupils study religious studies in key stage 4, enabling them to develop their understanding of different faiths, cultures and backgrounds. This adds significantly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- Recently qualified teachers feel well supported by school leaders. They value the

mentors appointed to oversee their induction and development, and the opportunities to attend training within school and events organised by the local authority.

Governance of the school

- Governors bring a wealth of knowledge and experience of school improvement, governance and safeguarding. They are well organised, strategic and understand how successful schools operate.
- Training for governors has strengthened their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and empowered them to challenge and support leaders to make improvements. They feel that they receive a good range of information about the school from senior leaders. They know how to interpret this information and question leaders about the school's performance.
- They demonstrate a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and have an honest, realistic view of the school's effectiveness.
- Governors take specific responsibility for finding out, and reporting on pupils who are disadvantaged, have SEN and or disabilities, and for checking the school's safeguarding arrangements.
- Governors oversee effectively arrangements for managing the performance of staff and for monitoring pupils' behaviour.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All required checks are carried out when recruiting new staff to work with children.
- The designated leader for child protection ensures that incidents are followed up and records are maintained fully. Links with local support agencies to protect pupils are firmly established.
- Pupils are shown how to keep safe, including when using mobile phones and the internet.
- The school site is secure. Risk assessments are routinely carried out and are secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The impact of leaders' actions to improve teaching are clearly evident across a wide range of subjects. Most teachers are well organised; they know their pupils well and plan learning to meet their needs. In almost all subjects, pupils' books show their personal targets. When asked, pupils can explain what these targets are and what they need to do to attain them.
- Teachers display good subject knowledge. They use a range of techniques, for example asking probing questions to stimulate pupils' interest and engage them in learning. They set pupils tight timescales to complete their work. Most teachers are confident in managing learning in pairs and small groups, and in encouraging pupils to share their work with others.

- Behaviour is managed well. Inspectors found that good relations between staff and pupils mean that strategies to manage challenging behaviour are very rarely needed. When asked to, pupils readily respond to questioning. In a minority of lessons, pupils are not encouraged to contribute their views, and not all of them engage fully in discussion.
- Enthusiastic and knowledgeable teaching promotes pupils' learning well. For example, skilful questioning in a mathematics lesson helped pupils to make links with work covered previously about trigonometry. This helped them to solve challenging problems and deepen their understanding.
- In English, pupils are given time to follow up the detailed marking provided by teachers, in line with the school's agreed policy. This enables pupils to improve the quality of their work. Few examples of this technique were seen by inspectors in other subjects.
- Most teachers plan learning that captures and retains pupils' interest. Experiments in science and practical learning in art, physical education and drama are popular with pupils.
- At times, learning is not sufficiently planned to meet the different needs of pupils, especially in mixed-ability classes. Too often tasks do not stretch the most able pupils, or are too difficult for less able pupils. Not all teachers make regular checks during lessons to gauge whether pupils are working hard enough. Scrutiny of pupils' work by inspectors showed that in some cases, the quantity of pupils' work was minimal and the quality poor.
- Teachers' planning and assessment records show that they know the different needs and backgrounds of pupils in their classes, and how well they are doing. Only a few of them identify specific strategies to help disadvantaged pupils learn and ensure that they engage fully in learning.
- Reading is taught effectively. The few lower-ability pupils who read aloud to inspectors did so fluently and with some understanding. Inspectors noted that in lessons a small proportion of lower-ability boys need more help with their handwriting.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and appreciate what staff do for them. They feel listened to and value the work of the school council because they share their views with school leaders.
- Attendance is broadly average. Very few pupils are persistently absent. In the past, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils absent from school has been too high. Actions taken to reduce this are working and school records show this is improving.
- Pupils with specific SEN and/or disabilities who attend the school's specialist unit are integrated well into daily lessons. These pupils benefit greatly from learning alongside others in lessons, and the wider opportunities provided for them in the unit to develop

their social skills and engage with others in the local community. Staff liaise well with their parents to keep them informed of their child's progress and welfare.

- Careers advice begins when pupils join the school in Year 9. A programme of assemblies and work in tutorials ensures that they gain a full understanding of the opportunities available to them.
- The vast majority of free-text messages received from parents during the inspection praised the care and support provided for pupils, particularly when their child joins the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils feel safe and say that school is a friendly place to be. They told inspectors that incidents of bullying are rare. When they do occur, they feel that they are followed up appropriately by staff.
- Pupils are punctual to lessons. They move around the school sensibly and respectfully. At breaks and lunchtimes, they gather in friendship groups or play games together.
- School records confirm that bullying and incidents of poor behaviour are infrequent. Exclusions increased last year as senior leaders raised the expectations of how pupils should behave in school. This is stabilising this year and is being monitored effectively.
- Behaviour in lessons is very good. Inspectors saw very few incidents of poor behaviour. Classrooms are calm, purposeful environments in which to learn.
- Pupils understand the expectations of them, and know the rewards and sanctions used to manage their behaviour. If they misbehave, teachers use the school's agreed procedures and at a later stage, pastoral leaders intervene promptly to resolve matters.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Following the previous inspection, overall outcomes achieved by pupils declined. New leaders appointed in 2016 have changed this and overall results show significant improvement. This year, the proportion of pupils in Year 11 attaining a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and mathematics was high. The proportion of pupils attaining a good pass at grade 5 or above in both subjects was also high. Results in science showed a marked improvement. Almost all pupils progressed into further education, training or employment.
- New leaders quickly recognised that generally high attainment in recent years has masked some significant underachievement. Based on their above-average starting points, too many pupils have not made sufficient progress. The quality of teaching and leaders' monitoring have not been good enough to prevent this from happening.
- Pupils' progress is improving across most subject areas. Progress in mathematics and science is above average, and broadly average for English. The biggest gains have been made in mathematics. Improved leadership, training for staff and extra mathematics lessons have all contributed directly to this improvement. Overall progress in English is lower than the previous year due to the turbulence caused by significant

staffing changes. Leaders have acted promptly to stabilise this by ensuring that this year the department is fully staffed.

- The school's current assessment information shows that this improving trend is set to continue this year. Based on the same tests used in previous years, pupils in Year 11 are making good progress and are expected to attain exceptionally well in 2018. Current assessments of pupils' progress in Year 10 show a similar pattern.
- The progress made in mathematics by the most able pupils has improved significantly over the past two years. Similar improvements have been made in English by the most able girls, but not the most able boys, who did not do well enough last year.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are improving. Similar to other Year 11 pupils, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils meeting expectations in English and mathematics has risen year on year since the previous inspection. However, on average, disadvantaged pupils attain half a grade less than pupils with the same starting points nationally.
- Leaders make effective use of additional funding to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Funding is used to provide additional staff to work alongside pupils in lessons to aid their learning. Pupils with education, health and care plans made good progress in 2017. However, not all pupils receiving additional support made the progress expected of them.
- Pupils are free to select which GCSE subjects they pursue in key stage 4. Very few of them choose to study modern languages and humanities, and consequently the proportion of pupils attaining the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) qualification is low. Leaders acknowledge the need to increase the appeal of modern languages and geography to enable more pupils to qualify for this award.
- A minority of pupils continue to underachieve in a small proportion of foundation subjects. This also restricts the proportion of pupils who qualify for the EBacc award. Leaders are managing the quality of teaching and leadership of these subjects closely to ensure that they improve quickly.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The leader of the sixth form has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. He and his team have tackled areas of underperformance robustly. Their actions have had a positive impact upon raising achievement, subject leadership and improving the quality of teaching.
- Based on their different starting points, most students make good progress. Progress in academic subjects has been broadly in line with the national average in recent years, but this is now improving. Students make good progress in vocational subjects, where their overall attainment is above average. In 2017, variations in the performance of individual subjects have narrowed and the progress of a small proportion of disadvantaged students rose sharply.
- Good teaching challenges students' thinking. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to ask probing questions and test students' understanding. At times, teaching is less effective. Students are not always clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

- Students have very positive attitudes to learning. They work hard in lessons and they contribute to the wider life both of the sixth form and of the main school.
- Students spoke very positively about the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are on offer to them and of the individualised support that they receive from staff.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Students can choose from a wide range of academic and vocational subjects. Those who have not achieved a good pass in GCSE English or mathematics are supported effectively to gain these qualifications. Specialist provision for students wishing to study for qualifications in sport and receive intensive coaching in the school's rugby academy is well established.
- Careers advice and guidance is effective. Students are supported to make appropriate course choices when they join in Year 12 and, consequently, the number of students completing their studies is high. Last year, the majority of Year 13 students progressed on to university.
- A higher-than-average proportion of students move on to sustained employment, education or training at the end of their studies.
- Although students' attendance has improved, it is still too low. The leader of the sixth form acknowledges that his actions to address this have not had the same positive impact as they have had in other areas.

School details

Unique reference number	137948
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10037660

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,650
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	418
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Carrie Trail
Principal	Nicholas Martin
Telephone number	01462 629900
Website	www.samuelwhitbread.org.uk
Email address	swa-info@bestacademies.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 May 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is larger than average.
- The large majority of pupils are white British, very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, including those with an education, health and care plan, is below average.
- The school became part of the Bedfordshire Schools Trust in April 2016.
- The school met the government's floor targets (the minimum target that schools are expected to achieve) in 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 41 lessons. They carried out a learning walk to observe the quality of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, a group of recently qualified teachers, three members of the governing body, the chair and the chief executive of the trust, and three groups of pupils.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work. They looked at safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures, self-evaluation and improvement planning, minutes of governors’ meetings, records of pupils’ behaviour and attendance, and other information provided by senior leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils’ work in lessons. They considered the 229 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, and 222 free-text replies sent by parents and carers. They reviewed the 132 responses to Ofsted’s questionnaire for staff. No responses were received from pupils.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
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Heather Boardman	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Maher	Ofsted Inspector
Stef Lipinski	Her Majesty’s Inspector

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