

Sir Herbert Leon Academy

Fern Grove, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK2 3HQ

Inspection dates

13–14 October 2016

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The performance of the school has declined rapidly since the previous inspection in 2014. Leaders, including the Academies and Enterprise Trust, were too slow to provide the necessary support to prevent the decline. The leadership of the new principal and additional support provided in the last year have led to some positive improvements in pupils' outcomes. However, standards at the school remain inadequate.
- Many school leaders are new in post or inexperienced. Some of them are ineffective and lack the capacity to drive sustained improvement in their areas of responsibility.
- The overall progress made by pupils by the end of key stage 4 has been significantly below the national average in recent years and has been well below the government's minimum floor standards. Leaders have not acted quickly enough to secure sufficient improvement, especially in mathematics and science.
- Leaders and teachers have not done enough to challenge poor behaviour, which has a negative effect on learning and progress in too many lessons. The school behaviour policy is ineffective and not applied consistently.
- Attendance is low and not improving. Too many disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are regularly absent from school.
- The quality of teaching is too variable and weak overall. In many lessons, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low.
- Teachers do not use assessment information well enough to ensure that work is sufficiently challenging, especially for the most able pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The new principal has brought greater stability to the school. She has clear vision and ambition. Under her leadership, there are some early signs of improvement after serious decline.
- Leaders ensure that safeguarding is promoted well and provide substantial support to the most vulnerable pupils.
- Leadership and outcomes of the 16 to 19 study programmes are improving rapidly.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - securing effective leadership at all levels across the school
 - ensuring that all leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and use this to promote improvements with sufficient urgency
 - ensuring that there is a clear and consistently shared view about what effective teaching looks like across the curriculum
 - ensuring that leaders track robustly and review the work they do to check that their actions have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes
 - rapidly improve the reliability of assessment information, so that leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the progress of different groups of pupils across the school and in different year groups.
- Urgently improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that an effective behaviour policy is consistently applied across the school, so that low-level disruption is eradicated
 - providing teachers with effective support in managing behaviour
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour
 - ensuring that staff actively, consistently and effectively promote equality, tolerance and respect
 - improving the attendance of all pupils, including significantly reducing the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities that are frequently absent.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - plan challenging lessons that enable all pupils to make good progress from their particular starting points, especially the most able
 - use assessment information carefully to target teaching activities and interventions more sharply to reduce gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Ensure that the recent rapid improvements to the sixth form are sustained, so that all students make good progress from their starting points and are well prepared for their next steps.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Poor leadership since the last inspection has resulted in a steep decline in pupils' outcomes and behaviour. A legacy of underachievement remains. Current leaders do not have the capacity to make the rapid improvements required.
- Leaders have an overly optimistic view about the performance of the school. They focus too readily on improvements relative to the very poor standards of the last two years. Consequently, they do not always fully grasp the scale of the challenges that remain. This is particularly true in their positive view of pupils' behaviour, which is not shared by a majority of the staff and pupils.
- Leaders are often too slow to act. While leaders have produced relevant plans on paper, these do not match closely enough what is actually happening in the school. For example, in developing a strategy to improve attendance and behaviour, teachers who are struggling to manage poor pupil behaviour have not been provided with effective support.
- Senior leaders do not act swiftly enough to address the weaknesses in teaching. Although they have very recently started more rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and learning, this monitoring is not yet leading to the substantial improvements that are needed to ensure that pupils make sufficient progress.
- A large number of middle leaders are new in post or very inexperienced. Many currently lack the skills, confidence and authority to drive improvements in their areas. While they are very willing and supportive of the headteacher and now implementing a lot of new actions, it is too early to see sustained impact on pupils' progress.
- Leaders' evaluations of pupils' progress across the curriculum have been hampered by long-standing weaknesses in assessment and monitoring systems. This has often contributed to pupils achieving well below the standards that were expected of them. New systems to ensure that assessment information is accurate do not yet provide a reliable indication of current progress in key stages 3 and 4. Therefore, leaders are not able to act decisively to address areas of underachievement.
- The new special educational needs coordinator, appointed in September, has raised awareness of pupils' needs and provided support plans to staff. However, staff are not yet using these strategies consistently or effectively, so the progress of these pupils remains weak.
- The principal has only been in post for a year. She cares deeply about the welfare and outcomes of pupils and has provided much-needed stability. She has reorganised leadership teams and introduced a range of new policies and procedures to bring about improvement. However, not all members of the inexperienced leadership team are able to provide her with the support she needs to bring about sustained improvements and ensure that her vision of 'making every day count' becomes a reality.

- Leaders' and governors' monitoring of additional funding is rigorous. Interventions funded by the pupil premium are clearly itemised and scrutinised by governors. Leaders have sensibly prioritised improving teaching and pupils' literacy skills. While there are signs that progress for disadvantaged pupils is accelerating in English, in other areas of the curriculum, their progress is limited by weak teaching. The use of catch-up funding shows greater impact, with targeted pupils making accelerated progress in English and mathematics.
- Leaders have restructured the curriculum to ensure that pupils are better prepared for the demands of the new GCSE examinations. Pupils are now concentrating on a smaller number of subjects for increased time. However, time in lessons is not always used purposefully, so the potential learning gains from this decision are not yet being realised.
- The school provides adequately for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. There is an organised programme that is delivered through assemblies and the tutor system. Leaders have introduced a new system intended to promote core learning skills, such as self-management and teamwork. However, like other new developments, it is too early to see the impact on pupils' outcomes. The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities, although leaders do not monitor pupils' participation in these activities.
- Inspectors strongly recommend that the school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- A management board has been in place since the last inspection. The chair was appointed by the trust in September 2015 as a regional adviser and chairs the management board. Under her leadership, the board provides a high level of challenge to school leaders.
- The management board members visit the school regularly and have a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. However, they do not have a clear enough grasp of how well different groups of pupils are doing, particularly in key stage 3, because they do not have reliable assessment information to evaluate pupils' progress.
- The board members are fully supportive of the principal, but expressed concerns that they do not have confidence in all senior and middle leaders. The chair of the board acts as regional adviser for the trust and has provided consistent support for the school's leadership for the last year. Members of the management board acknowledge that past support had not consistently served the school well, but current support from the trust has been better focused on need.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The single central record is maintained well, ensuring that appropriate checks are carried out.

- Child protection policies and referral procedures are clear and understood by staff. Staff have all had up-to-date safeguarding training and are clear about referral routes for concerns.
- The large numbers of referrals to the safeguarding officer are managed well and the pastoral team provides high levels of support to the most vulnerable pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are low in many areas of the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not make enough progress.
- The learning needs of the most able pupils, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not met. Teachers do not use assessment effectively to ensure that work is challenging enough, or well suited to pupils' needs. Pupils are often given the same work irrespective of their starting points, repeating learning that they could previously do. As a result, they make slow progress.
- Teachers do not use the behaviour policy to challenge disruptive behaviour effectively. A significant number of pupils and staff expressed concerns, shared by inspectors, that behaviour in lessons is not good enough and that poor behaviour is not tackled effectively.
- Work in mathematics is not challenging enough, limiting pupils' development of key skills.
- Pupils' literacy and communication skills are not taught well enough. Although pupils in key stage 3 have a weekly lesson in the library, the time is not used effectively and pupils' choice of reading material is not checked. In lessons, pupils often do not engage willingly in reading and lack the confidence to explain their ideas clearly.
- The quality of feedback offered to pupils is extremely variable. When it is more effective, for example in history, pupils use the feedback to help them to improve their work. However, in many areas, and especially in key stage 3, pupils do not know what they have to do to improve their work.
- Where learning is most effective, teachers' expectations are high. They use good subject knowledge and positive relationships with pupils to motivate them and ensure that their learning needs are met. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson on 'Romeo and Juliet', pupils concentrated well and used elaborate and technical language in their writing. As a result, these pupils were being well prepared for the demands of the GCSE examination.
- Teaching in the sixth form, whilst not yet consistently good, is improving quickly. Planning is more tightly focused on ensuring that learning needs are met. There is a sense of urgency and students regularly receive helpful feedback on their work. For example, in a Year 13 health and social care lesson, students were extremely focused on improving their assignments, acting upon the feedback they had been given. Students were well motivated, with several eager to pursue future careers in the subject area.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Not all teachers promote equality of opportunity in lessons. Teachers do not do enough to challenge disrespectful behaviour in class. Inspectors saw pupils that were laughed at if they read incorrectly or got answers wrong. As a result, in many lessons, pupils are reluctant to contribute by sharing their ideas and opinions.
- In discussions with inspectors, some pupils had an insecure understanding of fundamental British values and homophobia.
- Teachers' expectations are too low and they do not demand enough from pupils. Many pupils do not take pride in the presentation of their work, which is often messy and unfinished.
- The pastoral team is new. It provides high levels of support to small numbers of the most vulnerable pupils. However, its work has not yet led to the necessary improvements to behaviour or attendance across the school. There is a lack of experience within the pastoral system and leaders recognise that there is still much work to do.
- Pupils feel safe in the school. Pupils report that they feel a sense of community and belonging and that there is an adult they can talk to if they are concerned about anything. This view is shared by staff and parents.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and learn about issues relevant to their age. For example, Year 10 pupils demonstrated a secure understanding of the danger of drugs following a focused programme during their tutor time.
- Pupils' personal development is supported by a programme of activities during tutor time, where they discuss topical issues and global affairs. However, not all pupils engage well enough to take full advantage of these sessions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Pupils' poor behaviour leads to a lack of learning and progress too often. Inspectors observed pupils often talking over the teacher and interrupting each other during discussions. Pupils are often slow to settle to their work.
- Leaders have not been successful in introducing a clear, consistent and effective whole-school behaviour policy. Too many teachers have low expectations of how pupils should behave and, in many lessons, pupils are not able to learn well because teachers do not challenge the poor behaviour of their classmates. This is particularly true in classes taught by inexperienced staff.
- Attendance is low and is not improving. Too many pupils are regularly absent from school, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Although there have been slight reductions in the number of pupils who regularly miss school, overall attendance fell this year.

- High numbers of pupils miss lessons due to exclusion. Increasingly, the school is managing poor behaviour within school, rather than excluding pupils. However, there is little evidence that behaviour is improving and a majority of staff and pupils raised concerns about poor behaviour and do not feel that leaders manage behaviour effectively.
- Pupils' behaviour is better outside lessons. The school is generally calm and orderly. Pupils are polite to visitors and wear their uniform well.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Outcomes have fallen sharply since the last inspection. In 2014 and 2015, the proportion of Year 11 pupils who gained at least five GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, was significantly below the national average. This represented inadequate progress from these pupils' starting points.
- In 2015, the school was well below the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- Pupils' progress in a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics, has been well below average. While there are signs of improvement in English, pupils continue to underachieve in mathematics, science and humanities subjects. The standard of work seen in key stage 4 pupils' books and in lessons during the inspection suggests that this underachievement has not yet been reversed. In some subject areas, for example business studies, the progress of current pupils has been held back by a legacy of changes in staffing and poor teaching, which is only just being addressed.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new assessment system, which is not yet clearly understood by staff or pupils. Leaders agree that pupil progress information is currently unreliable, particularly in key stage 3. When scrutinising pupils' books, inspectors found that too few pupils are making secure progress in a range of subjects across the curriculum.
- Provisional results show that GCSE results improved in some areas in 2016, with the numbers achieving at least a grade C in both English and mathematics doubling. However, this improvement was from a very low base and the progress made by pupils was still well below the national average.
- Disadvantaged pupils have made poor progress in recent years in comparison with all pupils nationally with the same starting points. Provisional 2016 GCSE results suggest that disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make the accelerated progress needed to catch up in English. However, large differences remain in many subject areas, including mathematics, science and humanities.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make inadequate progress from their starting points. While the leadership of, and provision for, these pupils have been revised, it is too soon to see any impact from these actions.
- Leaders readily acknowledge that expectations for the most able pupils are not high enough. There are very few pupils who achieve the higher GCSE grades of which they are capable. Leaders are not building on the higher starting points of pupils from key stage 2 by ensuring appropriate challenge in teaching.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- In 2015, the progress made by the large number of students on vocational courses was significantly below the national average. The very small number of students who completed A-level courses made progress in line with the national average.
- Poor results prompted a change in the leadership of the sixth form and a review of provision for current students. Leadership of the sixth form is now rapidly improving. Provisional 2016 results suggest that the decline in outcomes since the last inspection has been halted and, overall, students made above-average progress in BTEC National Diploma subjects.
- Leaders' monitoring information shows that outcomes for the current Year 13 pupil are predicted to improve next year as they are already achieving higher standards compared with last year.
- Attendance remains low, but is improving as a result of new systems to monitor attendance and leaders' work to ensure that students are placed on appropriate courses.
- Student numbers and retention rates are improving. However, some students have had to drop a qualification as a result of historic weaknesses in assessment and monitoring. This had a negative impact on progress in performing arts and health and social care.
- The improved curriculum is better matched to students' learning needs, especially for those who enter the sixth form with very low GCSE grades. The level 2 programme and the partnership with Milton Keynes Dons Football Club are examples of how provision is now more appropriate and motivating for students.
- Pass rates for those students who need to re-take GCSE English are improving as a result of a personalised tutoring programme. Leaders recognise that more support needs to be provided to students who need to re-take their GCSE mathematics.
- Leaders now monitor the effectiveness of teaching in the sixth form much more rigorously. Although improving, they acknowledge that the quality of teaching and students' progress is currently inconsistent.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted through the life skills programme. This programme provides students with a wide range of opportunities to contribute to the school and the local community, for example through the peer mentoring scheme.
- Leaders have improved careers information and guidance through the appointment of a dedicated adviser and access to off-site provision. Students who need it receive mentoring and additional support. As a result, all students who left the sixth form last year had secured a university place or employment.
- All students take part in work experience linked to their vocational subject choices. Several students described to inspectors how their work experience, combined with their studies, had helped them to decide on their future career paths and the next steps they needed to take.

- Safeguarding is effective and well promoted in the sixth form. Students report that they feel safe, well supported and feel a strong sense of belonging. The progress and welfare of vulnerable students are closely monitored by the pastoral team, including the safeguarding officer.

School details

Unique reference number	138439
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10012328

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 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	672
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	140
Appropriate authority	The management board
Chair	Louise Soden
Headteacher	Jo Trevenna
Telephone number	01908 624720
Website	www.shlacademy.org
Email address	cadkins@shlacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	2–3 July 2014

Information about this school

- Sir Herbert Leon Academy is a below-average-sized secondary school. There are slightly fewer girls than boys at the school.
- Sir Herbert Leon Academy became part of the Academies Enterprise Trust in September 2012.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average. Some pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at The Bridge Pupil Referral Unit.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The proportion who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is very low.
- One third of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. One quarter of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The school did not meet the government's 2015 floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils in 34 lessons in order to gather evidence to contribute to inspectors' evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Of these, 10 lessons were observed jointly with school leaders. In addition, inspectors carried out walks around the school, attended tutor periods, visited an assembly, visited the library and observed pupils' conduct around the site at break- and lunchtime.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the governing body, senior leaders, subject and pastoral middle leaders, teachers, support staff and several groups of pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation including that relating to: policies; records of governors' meetings; strategic planning; self-evaluation; pupils' achievement; behaviour and attendance information; and safeguarding. They also heard pupils read and viewed a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in five responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, 33 staff questionnaires and 17 pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Mark Bagust, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Keith Taylor	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Walshe	Ofsted Inspector
John McAteer	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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