

Sands School

48 East Street, Ashburton, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ13 7AX

Inspection dates

1–3 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils' emotional well-being and personal development are at the heart of this school. Senior leaders and staff work hard to ensure that the democratic ethos and aims of the school are upheld and implemented in practice. Equality, diversity and inclusion pervade all aspects of pupils' learning and being.
- The curriculum, including extra-curricular activities, is broad and balanced and provides pupils with the required areas of learning. This enables pupils to progress well and apply their skills across the wider curriculum, actively promoting their personal development.
- The quality of the teaching is good, so that pupils make good progress from their starting points. Staff plan well to meet the learning needs of individual pupils. Staff would benefit from further training opportunities to develop their teaching strategies, particularly for those pupils with specific learning difficulties.
- Leaders and staff meet weekly to plan and to evaluate teaching, learning and assessment. Pupils are given feedback on their progress. However, information on progress could include more precise targets for all pupils and, in particular, for the most able.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is an integral part of all pupils' learning. Pupils are thoughtful and caring. They demonstrate increasing self-confidence. They declare unanimously that they feel safe and know how to keep each other safe. Behaviour and attitudes in lessons are outstanding.
- Pupils are well prepared for examinations and for transition to the next stage of their education. Individual careers advice and guidance, including vocational courses and apprenticeships, provide pupils with options for further training and education.
- Governors play a highly supportive role in the running of the school. Several governors have a designated area of responsibility. This enables governors to challenge and support leaders effectively to secure further school improvement. Governors and leaders ensure that all of the independent school standards continue to be met.
- The overwhelming majority of parents are highly satisfied with the school and the support their children receive that helps them to become well-rounded individuals, well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching by:
 - providing training opportunities for staff to extend their expertise, particularly in teaching pupils with specific learning or behaviour difficulties
 - ensuring a more consistent approach to assessment to provide pupils with specific learning targets, particularly for those who are most able and those in examination years.
- Improve outcomes for pupils further by repairing the outdoor area for physical education.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders have worked hard to ensure that all of the independent school standards continue to be met.
- A strong ethos of equality and inclusion is at the heart of this school.
- High standards of behaviour, respect and tolerance are promoted within a 'holistic environment'. Pupils are treated as equals and learning is valued for its own sake.
- The school has successfully appointed teaching staff who have the experience, qualifications and eagerness to work in this setting.
- Teaching is strong and benefits from regular meetings where teaching and learning are discussed and shared by staff to provide an all-round approach for pupils.
- Leaders monitor teaching and provide feedback so that areas for development are identified. Pupils also provide feedback to teaching staff on how well they are able to learn in lessons.
- Relationships throughout the school are highly positive, contributing to a relaxed and creative learning environment.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and covers all the required areas of learning. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered well through the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and the regular 'school meetings'.
- Leaders strive to help pupils to overcome their difficulties, to persevere and begin to thrive. Attendance levels are high. Pupils enjoy being in the school.
- Provision for pupils' understanding of equality and diversity is outstanding. Pupils are taught to respect others in line with the Equality Act and in particular with regard to protected characteristics.
- Bullying is rare, reflecting the democratic culture of acceptance and tolerance of each other, promoted through the regular 'school meetings' and daily life in the school.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain through effective personal, social, and health education lessons. The weekly 'school meetings' provide opportunities for pupils to contribute, reflect, discuss and debate.
- No partisan views are tolerated. Staff work hard to teach pupils the dangers of extremism and to protect them from radicalisation.
- Pupils have impartial careers guidance for a range of vocational and academic courses and apprenticeships. At the appropriate point, they are enabled to make informed choices for the next stage of their education.

Pupils in recent cohorts have moved to a variety of colleges and are currently pursuing a range of courses and apprenticeships in line with their aims and specific interests.

Governance

- The priority of the chair and members of the governing body is to improve and sustain high-quality provision in line with the school's aims and ethos.

- Governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths. Procedures are monitored carefully so that high standards are maintained. Staff are well supported so that pupils are successful in their academic work and thrive in their personal development.
- Several members of the governing body have a specific area of responsibility. Regular meetings with school leaders prioritise and address areas for development.
- Governors know the school well and take time to understand what is needed to bring about sustained improvements in the quality of the provision.
- The governors support senior leaders to promote the well-being and achievement of the pupils and to maintain the high quality of provision. Reporting to the governors is regular and provides appropriate information.
- The governing body ensures that finances are used suitably to maintain the appropriate number of staff and to ensure that they have the necessary resources for their work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is reviewed and updated to ensure that the school meets the statutory requirements for safeguarding in line with guidance from the Secretary of State. The policy is published on the school website and is available as hard copy in school or on request.
- The designated safeguarding lead and deputies are trained to the appropriate level. All staff are trained appropriately and are informed of the latest guidance and requirements in all aspects of safeguarding.
- There is a strong safeguarding culture promoted by all. Leaders and staff are highly vigilant and aware of their responsibility to safeguard pupils. Staff know the procedures to follow in the event of any concerns raised by a pupil or a member of staff.
- Pupils are taught well about how to keep safe, e-safety and the dangers of extremism or radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching staff have good relationships with pupils, high expectations and plan lessons effectively. Teachers demonstrate good levels of experience and are adept at encouraging pupils so that they engage well in their learning.
- Lessons are conducted with mutual respect and consideration for others. Pupils listen attentively to others' points of view and discuss and debate with maturity.
- On arrival, initial assessment identifies pupils' starting points in literacy and numeracy and the areas they might need to work on to catch up.
- In English, the school has placed a strong emphasis on developing basic grammar and punctuation and this has contributed to improvements in pupils' skills in writing across the curriculum.
- In mathematics and science, teaching sets out clearly what is expected in presentation of work to show understanding, reasoning and application of knowledge. Pupils respond well to the clear guidance and make relevant notes on their diagrams and in their calculations, for example.

- Teaching provides one-to-one sessions in English and mathematics for those pupils who want additional support or who need to catch up.
- English and mathematics teaching also encourages pupils to develop their thinking and reasoning, to discuss and debate and to extend their learning to other subjects.
- Teachers and leaders meet regularly to discuss and share information about the progress made by individual pupils so that the teaching across the curriculum collectively supports their learning.
- However, ongoing assessment of pupils' work is inconsistent in providing pupils with specific learning targets so that they know the best way to progress. This applies particularly to feedback given to the most able pupils and those in the examination years.
- Cross-curricular discussions in weekly staff meetings are well used to plan innovative teaching both in and out of the classroom.
- The school provides appropriately for the academic needs of those pupils who have an education, health and care plan. The special needs department provides support in lessons for teaching staff. However, many staff have had little opportunity for training to extend their expertise in teaching strategies for pupils with specific learning difficulties.
- Assessment information for pupils with special educational needs is used accurately to assess pupils' starting points. Learning support staff work with pupils on an individual basis and liaise well with other staff in the department.
- Teachers use resources well to provide for all styles of learning. In science and geography, for example, teaching provided opportunities to explore models of glaciers and the human body. In art, woodwork and drama, pupils' creative skills were extended through the use of a range of stimulating materials.
- Teaching is sensitive to those pupils who have English as an additional language to ensure that they make rapid progress in English and across the curriculum.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils enter the school with expectations that are fulfilled through the implementation of the democratic principles stated in the school's aims and ethos. They find renewed energy and inspiration in a school that allows them the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning in a new way.
- Individual and small-group tutorial sessions provide guided support for pupils' personal development and learning. Staff nurture an enthusiasm for learning or spark further interest in a particular project or specialism.
- Pupils are enthused by taking part in the decision-making processes of the school. Senior leaders and staff provide unstinted support for the pupils.
- Pupils develop a clear sense of responsibility for their school and for each other.
- Staff are vigilant and work together with pupils to build a positive community of equality and inclusion. Staff respond to the first sign of any concern and work together to ensure

that help is always available when needed. Pupils are also alert to the needs of others and ask staff for help if they are aware of any concern.

- In discussion, pupils confirm that they are happy and feel safe and secure in the school, enjoy learning and want to succeed.
- Pupils state unanimously that the approach taken by the school builds their confidence and makes them feel safe so that they enjoy school and want to learn.
- Pupils help with tasks in school, for example at the end of the day. There is a rota of pupils who enjoy cooking who help to prepare lunch. This contributes to the school's democratic community spirit.
- Pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem improve considerably over time. Evidence from discussions demonstrates that they mature well, and are thoughtful and caring young people.
- Pupils learn to stay safe through the positive work that they undertake in lessons and through the curriculum.
- Leaders work particularly hard so that pupils understand issues such as exploitative relationships, and know how to stay safe on the internet, including from cyber bullying.
- Bullying in school is rare. Staff and leaders work together to resolve any bullying issues. Resolutions are shared at whole-school meetings.
- Pupils have well planned physical education lessons as well as outdoor activities and pursuits which challenge them well. However, the outdoor facilities at the school require some updating.
- Pupils and parents confirm that staff support is exceptional and that being in the school transforms many pupils' experiences. One parent commented, 'I wish this environment was available to all pupils who would benefit from it. I am so pleased with the school.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. There is no disruption in lessons. Pupils take responsibility for their learning.
- When they join the school, a number of pupils have had gaps in their education because of previous poor attendance. Staff work with patience and perseverance so that, over time, pupils settle well and begin to enjoy learning in the realisation that they are able to achieve. Previous fear of failure and lack of confidence in their ability to learn diminishes. Positive attitudes emerge, as shown by their perseverance in completing their work.
- For all pupils, attendance is high. The attendance of pupils who have a previous record of persistent absence is significantly improved. Records show that no pupils have gone missing. Staff are stringent in following procedures for the safety of pupils at all times and in all circumstances.
- The school prioritises the well-being of pupils at all times.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils arrive with attainment levels in line with or below the expected standards for their age in literacy and numeracy. A number of pupils arrive with gaps in their knowledge. This is because they have had prolonged periods of absence from their previous school.

- One-to-one sessions ensure that pupils make steady gains in numeracy and literacy, including in reading, spelling and comprehension. Pupils have opportunities to attend additional mathematics sessions. These ensure that those who need to catch up make good progress and achieve well.
- In English, the focus on grammar and punctuation has improved pupils' written skills, evident in their work across all subjects. Pupils read and research well to extend their knowledge further, based on topic work begun in lessons.
- In mathematics, pupils work well to solve problems, to build on previous knowledge and to develop their reasoning.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils with behavioural difficulties are well supported. Initial assessment ensures that needs are identified and well met and well supported to make progress from their individual starting points. Their progress is well monitored by the special needs department. Regular contact is made with parents who are informed and involved in their children's progress. This helps them to achieve in line with other pupils nationally with the same starting points.
- The most able pupils made good progress across the curriculum. With the encouragement of staff, they take a wide range of subjects to examination level and often develop and research their own areas of interest. A more focused approach to the use of target-setting would help the most able to achieve even better results.
- Results in public examinations demonstrate that pupils' achievement is in line with and at times above others nationally with similar starting points. Current pupils are preparing for examinations in externally accredited awards and GCSE subjects. The work in pupils' folders and books shows good progress over time.
- Pupils have a clear sense of their responsibilities for learning and for the decisions they will make for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils are well prepared for the transition to their next stage of education, training or employment. They are given individual careers advice and guidance for a range of academic and vocational courses and apprenticeships. For example, pupils from the previous cohort are studying a range of courses at a variety of colleges.
- Pupils have been successful in achieving a place in sixth-form colleges both locally and further afield in Bristol and in London.

School details

Unique reference number	113619
DfE registration number	878/6042
Inspection number	10020948

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Day
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Sands School
Chair	Jyles Robillard-Day
Headteacher	Sean Bellamy
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,900
Telephone number	01364 653666
Email address	enquiry@sands-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	1–3 October 2013

Information about this school

- The Sands School is an independent, co-educational, secondary day school for pupils aged 11 to 17, situated in the town of Ashburton in Devon.
- The school aims are based on the philosophy of democratic schooling: 'which puts pupils' social and emotional development at the heart of learning, to equip each young person to be an effective and contributing member of a free democratic society'.
- In line with this, the day-to-day running of the school and key decision-making processes are made by the weekly 'school meeting' where all staff and pupils are able to contribute.
- The school premises consist of a large nineteenth-century town house with gardens and grounds which are used for play and outdoor activities. The school has separate buildings

for woodwork, art and science and a climbing wall with appropriate flooring on site.

- The school is registered for up to 81 pupils aged from 11 to 17 years of age.
- Currently, there are 59 full-time pupils on roll, all of whom attend full time.
- A small proportion of pupils have experienced a disrupted education before coming to the school and some begin at the school late in their school career.
- Six pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Although most places are privately funded, some are funded by a charitable trust or by local authorities.
- The school is part of the wider organisation of worldwide democratic schools.
- The previous inspection of the school took place in October 2013.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 10 lessons and scrutinised samples of pupils' work in different subjects. Meetings and discussions were held with senior leaders and teaching staff. The inspector met with the chair of governors and also spoke with parents.
- The inspector examined a number of school documents to check compliance with the independent school standards. These included the school's website, policies, information about pupils' progress and the school's evaluation of its own work.
- Records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding were scrutinised.
- Responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey were taken into account.
- There were no staff questionnaire responses. The inspector attended the weekly 'school meeting' and spoke with several pupils individually and collectively.

Inspection team

Flora Bean, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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