

Soham Village College

Sand Street, Soham, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 5AA

Inspection dates

6–7 December 2016

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The head of school provides highly effective leadership focused on rapid, long-term, sustainable improvement. Senior leaders have created a culture of high expectations.
- The executive headteacher, senior leaders and governors are highly ambitious for the school. They have a very accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The way in which the school promotes pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Rightly, governors are proud of the range of support given to pupils on a one-to-one basis.
- Procedures to safeguard pupils are robust. The work to support pupils, including the most vulnerable, is outstanding.
- Leaders' work to improve the quality of teaching has been effective. Teaching is now good, with areas of outstanding practice.
- Last year, the progress made by Year 11 pupils from their different starting points was significantly above average.
- The vast majority of pupils make good progress across the curriculum.
- Leaders and teachers track individual pupils' progress rigorously. They ensure that there is a swift response to any identified issues.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils has improved significantly and is now broadly in line with all pupils nationally. However, there are still some differences in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and their peers.
- There are strong relationships between pupils and staff, and pupils say that this helps them make better progress.
- Most teachers work effectively to support pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. However, some teachers do not address pupils' spelling or punctuation errors sufficiently.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. On the rare occasions where teaching is less effective, a small minority of pupils disrupt the learning of others.
- Pupils move around the large and complex site quickly to ensure that they are punctual for their lessons. Breaktimes and lunchtimes are civilised occasions.
- Overall, attendance is significantly higher than the national figure. However, leaders quite rightly have identified the persistent absence of some groups as a continued focus.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Ninety-seven per cent of parents who completed the Parent View survey would recommend the school to another parent.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - sharing the very best practice in the school more widely to improve the small amount of teaching that is less effective
 - eradicating the low-level disruption displayed by a very small minority of pupils
 - addressing pupils' spelling or punctuation errors, especially for those pupils with low prior attainment.
- Further diminish the differences in the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally by maintaining high aspirations for accelerating their progress, particularly in the core subjects.
- Embed leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance, especially the attendance of disadvantaged pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Through their relentless insistence on high standards, leaders have created a culture of academic excellence. The high-quality care and welfare that permeates the school provides a nurturing environment that supports pupils extremely well.
- Leaders, governors and the trust have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The self-evaluation is honest, logical and based soundly on how well pupils achieve.
- Leaders' detailed monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment enables them to take the actions needed to meet pupils' needs effectively. Well-targeted interventions support pupils' additional learning needs as well as teaching pupils how to modify their behaviour.
- Senior leaders undertake routine, systematic and rigorous checks on how well pupils who attend alternative provision are achieving. School staff, the local authority representative and governors review pupils' individual alternative education plans regularly. Performance information reveals the positive impact 'The Hub' and 'The Individual Student Learning Environment' (The Isle) has on pupils who access this provision.
- Leaders ensure that the additional government funding is used effectively. Clear plans for the ways in which the pupil premium funding is used are securing improvements in the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Results for Year 11 disadvantaged pupils last year saw a significant increase in the pupils' progress, which is now broadly in line with all pupils nationally.
- The management of teachers' performance is highly personalised and rigorous. Teachers' targets link closely to school improvement priorities and teachers' own professional development. Leaders ensure that teachers' pay progression relates closely to how well their pupils achieve.
- There are good opportunities for staff to develop professionally. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching regularly and use what they find out to tailor training for individual teachers. Staff are highly positive about the training they receive, especially the 'research lesson study'. Newly qualified teachers speak effusively about the support they receive, and are grateful that they are pushed to be the best teacher they can be.
- Leaders are successfully improving the quality of teaching. However, inspectors noted some low-level disruption when teaching is less effective. Leaders are aware of this, and plan to share best practice more widely to support these teachers further.
- The broad curriculum caters for pupils' needs well. Enrichment opportunities are good. Pupils have a range of opportunities to be creative. Over 400 pupils sang at Ely Cathedral last year, and rehearsals are in progress for this year's performance.
- Literacy and numeracy are current priorities. The numeracy provision in Year 7 has been enhanced, for example through transition work with the local primary schools. The 'literacy moose' reinforces the school's focus on correct spelling and precise grammar. High-quality display work, for example the 'Proud of Soham' collection, highlights and celebrates pupils' successes in writing.

- The newly formed leadership team for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has clear plans on how to improve the provision. Staff work closely with the two 'Hub' managers to monitor outcomes for the pupils. The coordinator has already started to improve the transition arrangements for pupils new to the school.
- The curriculum is extended very effectively by a rich variety of clubs and after-school activities. A recent audit shows that the most popular, the Duke of Edinburgh's bronze award, had well over 100 pupils attending. Other well-attended groups were the hockey club and the girls' choir. There is a vast array of musical groups on offer, including choir, orchestra, brass band, string quartet and jazz ensemble. Pupils say that the extra-curricular activities are popular and help to develop skills across a range of areas.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed very successfully. The school's PRIDE agenda (positivity, responsibility, integrity, drive and empathy) is the blueprint for how staff and pupils interact. The updated personal, social, health and economics education programme, taught by a specialist team, teaches pupils to value differences. As one pupil said, 'this is a school that helps you find your identity'.
- Pupils treat each other with courtesy and respect, and are tolerant of others' ideas and viewpoints. Pupils have a clear understanding of British values.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a highly accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas that require further development. They are aware of pupils' progress, including groups of pupils. They know where pupils' outcomes are not as strong and challenge leaders appropriately.
- Governors structure their work well to focus effectively on how to maintain high standards and secure further improvements.
- The regular 'key performance indicator' updates allow governors to monitor the school's effectiveness well, and the clear lines of accountability enable them to address any areas they identify as underperforming.
- Governors undertake a skills audit to ensure that they have a wide range of expertise. They interpret information effectively to see how well the school is performing. They make informed decisions based on their visits to the school.
- Governors oversee the performance management process effectively.
- Governors ensure proper financial accountability, including the use of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff, pupils and parents agree overwhelmingly that there is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school.
- Governors monitor that all the required checks are carried out to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children.

- The school has very clear safeguarding and child protection policies. Arrangements are reviewed regularly to ensure that the procedures protect pupils from harm effectively.
- Child protection review meetings are very well managed. The designated safeguarding governor makes effective checks on the way in which the school handles referrals. The referral process is robust. The link governor audits files and carries out spot checks on the single central record. As a result of the meticulous record-keeping, the regular updates and the wealth of information available, staff keep a close focus on individual pupils and provide support at an early stage.
- The school responds to changes in the guidance for safeguarding and child protection quickly and methodically. Staff are aware, through training and updates, of how to spot the potential signs of abuse. Staff know what they need to refer on to others and how to do it. Leaders establish strong links with outside agencies and are tenacious in following up the specific needs of individual pupils.
- Pupils say that they feel safe. Teachers make good use of lessons, tutor times and assemblies to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when using social media. The school takes its online safety responsibilities very seriously, for example pupils have to sign the acceptable use policy before they can access the internet and a robust filtering system prevents inappropriate use of the internet.
- Pupils are taught about the risks attached to extremism and radicalisation.
- The school site is safe and secure. Leaders complete effective risk assessments, which ensure that pupils can use all aspects of the site safely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders' innovative development programme to improve the quality of teaching has been highly effective. 'Teachmeets', research with Cambridge University and the work of 'pedagogy leaders' have helped to create areas of outstanding practice in school.
- The strong relationships between pupils and teachers are a common feature in lessons. Teachers' clear expectations that pupils should behave well ensure that most pupils learn effectively.
- Most pupils demonstrate extremely positive attitudes in lessons. However, occasionally a small minority of pupils disrupt the learning of others. This usually occurs when the quality of teaching is less effective and the pace of learning slows.
- Generally, teachers expect pupils to work hard and take care to ensure that pupils understand concepts fully. Teachers are very keen to ensure that pupils develop a deeper understanding of the work covered. Teachers plan activities that make pupils think hard about their learning.
- Teachers use a range of questioning styles and techniques to probe pupils' understanding to elicit more information and keep pupils focused.
- Teachers know their pupils well. They plan work carefully to meet pupils' needs. Consequently, time in lessons is used productively.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Pupils avoid common pitfalls as teachers guide them skilfully through challenging concepts.

- Pupils, including lower-attaining pupils, display a resilience to learn from their mistakes. Pupils want to learn, want to improve their work and are keen to make good progress in their learning.
- Most pupils value the regular homework.
- Pupils value teachers' feedback, which helps them to improve the parts of their work that they found difficult.
- Parents and pupils appreciate the time given by teachers outside of normal lessons to help them improve their learning. This is a key factor in strengthening pupils' progress.
- Most teachers in subjects other than English and mathematics work effectively to support pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Recent work carried out by the trust has been effective at improving the transition arrangements from key stage 2 to key stage 3 so that pupils' numeracy skills develop well. However, some teachers do not address spelling or punctuation errors. Where this happens, pupils continue to make the same mistakes, which prevents them from making better progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils receive the support that they need to help them succeed at school because staff are well informed about how well pupils develop academically and socially.
- The school is a highly inclusive place to learn. Leaders do not abdicate responsibility when faced with pupils' challenging behaviour. Instead, they have developed a systematic approach that is highly effective in managing inappropriate behaviour.
- The school caters very effectively for the welfare and personal development of vulnerable pupils through The Hub and the different learning programmes it offers. Close and productive partnerships with parents lead to very positive outcomes for the pupils.
- The Isle meets the needs of pupils who display challenging behaviour well. Leaders ensure that the pupils have individual timetables that consider their specific requirements. Pupils in Year 11 last year who used The Isle all found places in either education, employment or training when they left school.
- The school works closely with other agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the help that they need. Staff are tenacious in their follow-up when referrals are taking too long.
- The school's comprehensive support systems ensure that children looked after are safe and supported well. External reviews regularly check the school's processes to ensure that they remain highly effective.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare. They are confident that if they had a problem their tutor or a member of the student services team would help them.
- There is a comprehensive careers programme for pupils in all year groups. The careers guidance adviser works with all pupils, but more closely with those who are without firm plans for the future. The school's link governor focuses regularly on the destinations of school leavers. This area is a real strength of the school.

- Leaders review and update the school's personal, social, health and economics education programme to keep pace with changing perspectives. Recent alterations include a greater focus on female genital mutilation and domestic violence, in response to national issues.
- Pupils feel safe at school. Ninety-five per cent of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that their children feel safe at school. The school's work to help pupils stay safe is highly effective.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff maintain a highly visible presence around the school. Leaders carry out 'behaviour walks' to check on how well pupils behave. Where any issues arise, leaders monitor these carefully. Leaders' systematic recording of behavioural issues, alongside early interventions, has led to an improvement in pupils' behaviour year on year.
- The consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour reinforces successfully the importance of pupils regulating their own behaviour and considering the thoughts and feelings of others. Anger management and individual mentoring work well to help pupils improve their behaviour.
- Leaders monitor pupils' attendance carefully. The actions taken to improve and maintain attendance have been extremely effective. The ways in which the attendance team works with parents and manages initial concerns have led to much-improved attendance.
- The current attendance figure for all pupils is significantly higher than the national figure. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved from last year and is now close to the national figure for all pupils. However, leaders have identified that the attendance of this group of pupils needs to improve further still.
- The persistent absenteeism of a few groups, especially disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is still too high. Leaders have recruited a family support worker to support these pupils further and are monitoring their attendance closely. Leaders are already seeing improvements in the attendance of these groups this year.
- Pupils like their school and are proud to be members of the school community. They move about a large and complex site in an orderly way. This is because the staff supervise them well and pupils respect staff's expectations.
- Displays are neat and tidy. The site is well maintained and virtually free of litter. Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors; they are friendly, willing to talk to others and hold open doors for visitors.
- Pupils say that occasionally a small minority of pupils disrupt their learning. During the inspection, some low-level disruption was noted and this supports the views of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- On entry to the school, standards in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly in line with the national figures. In 2016, Year 11 pupils made significantly more progress

in a range of subjects than other pupils nationally, including English, science, modern foreign languages and humanities.

- The progress of disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, is good and improving. Leaders' use of the additional funding helps pupils achieve the grades of which they are capable. The pupils' progress is effectively monitored and coordinated. Some disadvantaged pupils outperform their peers. However, leaders and governors are aware that some differences in attainment still exist between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in English, mathematics and other subjects.
- Pupils' attainment across a broad range of subjects is high and improving. In 2016, 70% of Year 11 pupils attained at least a C grade in English and mathematics, which is higher than the national average. The school's assessment information shows a similar positive picture for current pupils' attainment in most year groups. However, leaders acknowledge that in some subjects current Year 11 pupils are not working at the standard expected.
- The most able pupils make good progress across many subjects. In 2016, in English, science, modern foreign languages and humanities the progress of most-able pupils in Year 11 was significantly above average. Current pupils are making equally strong progress. This is due to the better quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress from their individual starting points. Teachers plan activities that challenge them to make good progress. Teaching assistants work effectively to support pupils.
- Last year, all six pupils who attended alternative provision achieved more than three GCSEs. This was in line with their target grades. Additionally, their attendance improved and the number of fixed-term exclusions for this group reduced significantly from that in previous years.
- Leaders use the additional funding that they receive for catch-up lessons effectively. All the pupils who were entitled to this support have made good progress. Most of the pupils have now caught up with their peers.
- The school develops pupils' love of reading well through the 'Extended Home Learning Projects' in key stage 3, 'Reading Leaders' and the World Book Day celebration. Publicising teachers' favourite books highlights the enjoyment pupils can get from reading. The Year 10 pupils read fluently. Pupils who were eligible for catch-up funding last year display slightly weaker reading skills and show differing levels of ability for reading comprehension. However, the pupils make good progress in their reading from their starting points.
- The school prepares pupils well for when they leave school. Last year, almost all pupils secured a place in either further education, employment or training.

School details

Unique reference number	136610
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10017323

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	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,364
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Jules Hillier
Head of school	Jon Hampson
Telephone number	01353 724100
Website	http://www.sohamvc.org/
Email address	svc@soham-college.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 April – 1 May 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets the 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 part of the Staploe Educational Trust.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is below the national average.
- The head of school has been in post since September 2016. The previous headteacher is now the executive headteacher of the academy trust.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- A small proportion of pupils have some of their lessons at the 'The Isle'. This is the school's on-site provision and is mainly for pupils who have complex needs, who are at risk of exclusion or who need support to re-engage in learning.
- A very small proportion of pupils access education off-site through the Cambridge Regional College, West Suffolk College, the Centre School at Cottenham or the Red Balloon of the Air online programme.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out 43 observations, some of which were joint observations with senior leaders, across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects. They also visited tutor group sessions and attended an assembly.
- Inspectors looked carefully at pupils' work and talked to pupils from different year groups to discuss their experience of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the executive headteacher, the head of school, senior and middle leaders, newly qualified teachers, governors and representatives from the trust.
- An inspector held a telephone conversation with a leader from the Red Balloon Learner Centre, one of the alternative provision units the school uses.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including safeguarding records, case studies, attendance records, self-evaluation summaries, the school improvement plan and current assessment information.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 50 pupils, 12 parents and 93 members of staff from the online questionnaires, and considered the 136 responses on Parent View.

Inspection team

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Jenny Carpenter	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Whear	Ofsted Inspector
Cathy Tooze	Ofsted Inspector
Russell Ayling	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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