

Sandy Hill Academy

Sandy Hill, St Austell, Cornwall PL25 3AT

Inspection dates

23–24 February 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Senior and middle leaders have the highest expectations for the pupils and staff. Pupils respond wholeheartedly to these in their positive attitudes and eagerness to learn.
- Pupils' progress is very strong. Year-on-year pupils' progress has improved in all areas of the curriculum. Current pupils are making very marked progress.
- Teachers plan learning that closely matches the needs of individual learners, challenging all pupils, including the most able, to reach the very highest standards. They ensure that every pupil has the knowledge, understanding and skills to tackle problems confidently.
- Teaching assistants encourage pupils to improve their work and accept nothing less than the best.
- Pupils are self-confident and resilient learners. They value feedback that helps them improve their work. They debate challenging topics with confidence and self-assurance.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are polite and courteous towards one another, staff and visitors. Older pupils lead activities for younger pupils and serve as strong role models.
- Safeguarding arrangements are highly effective. Pupils feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe, including when online.
- Children get off to a flying start in the early years. They make rapid progress in reading, writing and number work in both the Nursery and Reception classes. Children move seamlessly into Year 1.
- Every opportunity is taken in the early years to develop children's skills and independence. They show real curiosity and teachers embrace this to deepen children's understanding. Their writing is at a particularly advanced level for their age.
- Parents are overwhelmingly happy with their children's progress and personal development. They would, however, like further support so they can best help their children complete homework.
- Directors of the multi-academy trust hold senior leaders closely to account. They ensure that additional funding is spent where it will have the greatest impact. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide further advice to parents and carers so they are well placed to support pupils with their learning at home.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Senior leaders have developed a culture where all members of the school community have high expectations of one another. Only the best will do at Sandy Hill and all strive to ensure that this is achieved. Leaders have equipped all staff and pupils to be able to succeed. As a result, high standards are reached.
- Middle leaders have been recruited carefully and trained well to carry out their roles. They are knowledgeable about their specific responsibilities, pursue further training to enhance their skills and train other staff. All middle leaders monitor pupils' progress meticulously and use assessment information effectively to ensure that pupils are on track to reach the aspirational targets they are set. They arrange extra support in a timely fashion to make sure that no pupil falls behind.
- Senior leaders carefully track pupils' progress with precision. They work with other schools in the multi-academy trust and more widely to ensure their accuracy and security in assessment. Consequently, they are able to direct resources and support learning where it is most needed to ensure that Sandy Hill pupils consistently achieve the very highest standards.
- Staff training is carefully designed to meet each member of staff's individual needs. This training is prudently matched to the school's development priorities. As a result, all staff are well prepared to improve their teaching further. The support for newly qualified teachers is particularly effective.
- A wide range of monitoring systems are in place to assure leaders and governors that teaching is of the highest quality and is most effective. All staff value and act swiftly on any feedback to improve the quality of their teaching.
- Leaders with responsibility for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are particularly strong. They call on specialists to advise when necessary and help teaching staff to best meet this group of pupils' specific needs. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make strong progress both academically and in their personal development.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, enhanced by visits, such as to the Eden Project. Pupils learn about the nutrient cycle to further enhance their knowledge, skills and understanding in science. The current focus on enhancing pupils' scientific, technical and engineering skills heightens pupils' interest, develops relationships with local businesses, improves pupils' employability skills and prepares pupils well for future career opportunities.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is woven through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Pupils' studies of festivals, such as Diwali, help them deepen their understanding of a variety of religions and cultures. This prepares them effectively for life in modern Britain.

- Leaders use the sport premium carefully to improve pupils' agility and increase their participation in team games. Year on year, the number of pupils taking part has increased and school teams have achieved success in high-level competitions locally and across Cornwall.
- Leaders promote equality of opportunity effectively. No pupil is left out and inclusivity is a strong feature, particularly for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The academy trust provides good support for the school. This is especially seen in the subject networks that allow leaders with responsibility for subjects and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to keep up to date with the latest developments in their areas. Equally, the school provides good support to other schools in the trust and at strategic level, helping to raise standards in all the trust's schools.
- Hub councillors, who perform the role of local governors, are acutely aware of the school's strengths and the priorities for further improvement. They allocate funding, including pupil premium, very carefully to improve the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils, for example, make at least as good progress as other pupils nationally and often better.
- Leaders provide parents with useful information about their children's progress, both academically and in their personal development. Parents appreciate this and are aware of the higher expectations of the new national curriculum. However, they would value further advice on how best to support their children to reach the higher standards.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They comment about the rapid progress their children make and how they develop personally. Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, would recommend Sandy Hill Academy to other parents.

Governance

- Directors and hub councillors have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They ensure that funding, including pupil premium, is used carefully to have maximum impact. They hold leaders to account closely to ensure that the school continues to improve even further.
- Directors have overseen the restructuring of the leadership arrangements. This has increased the leadership capacity at Sandy Hill, particularly through the appointment of the head of school who now takes responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school. Consequently, the headteacher is well placed to support other schools in the trust, knowing that Sandy Hill is in safe hands.
- Directors oversee a robust performance management system that draws on a wide range of sources to recognise the high-quality teaching and strong leadership.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders with specific responsibilities for safeguarding are assiduous in carrying out their duties. They pressure appropriate external agencies to help, and so ensure that each pupil is safe.

- The site is secure and well maintained. Staff take pride in knowing each pupil and their family well so they can arrange the best support when it is needed. Pupils comment on how they trust the staff and can confide in them.
- The procedures for checking the suitability of staff before taking up their appointment are robust and the statutory checks are carried out.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers' expectations are high. In every class, work is set at a challenging level for all pupils. Pupils, from Reception upwards, challenge each other to do their very best. As a result, there is a strong culture of improvement across the school and this ensures that pupils reach high standards in all aspects of the curriculum.
- Teaching staff use their strong subject knowledge across the curriculum to clearly explain concepts and ask challenging questions which deepen pupils' understanding. Staff regularly check pupils' understanding to pick up any misconceptions, which are quickly rectified.
- Teachers have a detailed appreciation of what pupils know, understand and can do. They use assessment information effectively to identify how secure pupils are in each aspect of their work, and plan learning accordingly to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. This is particularly seen in the teaching of mathematics where teachers' planning gives appropriate emphasis to certain parts of the mathematics curriculum where pupils are less confident in their understanding.
- Teachers and teaching assistants plan learning carefully, using a range of approaches, to support pupils to make the best progress. Each pupil's needs, particularly of those who are disadvantaged as well as those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are met well.
- Leaders organise a wide range of moderation activities across the trust and more widely to ensure that assessments are reliable. Recent moderation show that staff are highly skilled at accurately assessing pupils' achievements and identifying 'next steps' in pupils' learning.
- All staff take the same consistent approach to providing pupils with feedback, following the school's policy. Pupils are clear about their 'next steps' to improve their learning. As a result, pupils are reaching higher standards consistently in all years.
- Teaching assistants have the same high expectations as teachers. For example, they insist on the highest levels of precision in pupils' written work. They are adept at providing support to help pupils develop their independence and resilience. The strong links they forge with parents and carers ensures that pupils' self-esteem is high.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are well challenged in their thinking. They can debate confidently, for example on anti-Semitism, demonstrating their understanding of different and controversial viewpoints.

- Highly effective teaching of phonics ensures that pupils read challenging texts fluently and use their skills to write complex words accurately. When usual teaching methods do not result in rapid progress, staff work with leaders to explore different techniques to ensure that all pupils read fluently. The training of teaching assistants to support phonics teaching is resulting in improved outcomes for all pupils, but especially disadvantaged pupils. Pupils' strong reading skills mean they can understand particularly challenging questions in key stage 2.
- Parents receive timely and accurate information about their child's progress. Teaching staff liaise well with parents and 'open afternoons' are used to provide further information about pupils' progress. Teachers use homework to consolidate and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. However, some parents commented that they do not always know how best to support their children in completing homework tasks.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They speak positively about their learning and about their personal development. Parents who spoke to inspectors were unanimous in their view that their child has developed in confidence and improved in their academic ability.
- Pupils' self-confidence is strong. This is seen through their attitudes to learning, where there is an eagerness to reflect on their own progress. Pupils willingly accept critical evaluation from classmates and teaching staff. Pupils' resilience is high and older pupils are well prepared to move on to secondary school.
- Pupils willingly take on leadership roles and carry out their duties diligently. 'Playtime pals' and sports leaders provide activities for pupils at breaktimes. They are tenacious in their duties, particularly in health and safety. They use their training well to make sure that equipment is used safely, especially when it is wet.
- Staff prepare pupils well to face risks in society. Pupils talk knowledgeably about staying safe when using computers and social media. They are clear on routines to follow when they encounter extreme views.
- Pupils have a good understanding of living in modern Britain and differences between different areas within the United Kingdom. They study a range of faiths and cultures in their artwork, religious education and music.
- The school environment is stimulating and supports pupils' learning well. Staff make good use of the resources available to them. Pupils are keen to have their work displayed and say they particularly value the 'speech bubbles' which they use to demonstrate their thinking.

- The parent support adviser has been particularly effective in helping pupils who develop anxiety or face particular challenges out of school. She provides high-quality support to families who need it and is swift to involve specialist agencies when necessary. Her work with disadvantaged pupils and their families has been especially effective in improving their attendance and punctuality.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils show good manners and respect for each other, adults and visitors. In lessons there is consistently a high level of concentration and keenness to learn. Pupils play well together at social times.
- Behaviour records show that a few pupils present challenging behaviour. Pupils are clear about the behaviour expectations and respond well to the sanctions that are used. As a result, behaviour logs show that no pupil repeats the behaviour, demonstrating the effectiveness of the sanctions used and the support given to the pupil and their family. Consequently, there have been no exclusions since the previous inspection in 2012.
- Pupils' attendance is above the national average. Punctuality has improved year on year and now instances of pupils being late after the register has closed are very rare.
- Persistent absence is very low. Pupils do not want to miss a day at school.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils are working at high standards in all year groups. In the early years and in key stages 1 and 2, outcomes have improved year on year since the previous inspection. In 2016, pupils at the end of key stage 2 achieved scores which placed the school in the top 3% of schools in the country.
- For current pupils, progress over time is very strong. Almost all pupils in Year 6 are on track to meet the expectations for their age and a high proportion are on track to achieve high scores in reading, writing, mathematics and English grammar, punctuation and spelling. As a result of the well-crafted planning and high quality of teaching in science, pupils make particularly strong progress in this subject.
- Across key stage 2, pupils are making good progress towards achieving the standards expected for their age with an increasing proportion working at the higher standard. Pupils in Year 3 are confident in the use of prefixes and suffixes and Year 4 pupils can identify the difference between alliteration and sibilance when constructing poems.
- In key stage 1, pupils make strong progress. Their writing is advanced, with many writing well-crafted pieces of extended writing using complex sentence structures and a wide range of punctuation appropriately.
- In almost all years, disadvantaged pupils make at least the same progress as their peers who have similar starting points. Highly effective support ensures that gaps have been eradicated.

- The most able pupils are working at the high standard across key stage 2. They are developing their mastery skills in mathematics, for example, solving challenging multi-step problems. Their writing is particularly strong, including accurate use of English grammar, punctuation and spelling across the curriculum. They read well with fluency and intonation, and can infer meaning from the text they are reading.
- Strong teaching in the early years is providing children with a solid foundation on which they can build. Children communicate well, both verbally and in writing, from early stages.
- Pupils are making strong progress in their phonics. Teaching staff are using a variety of different techniques and methods to help pupils improve their reading skills. When children start in Nursery, they are encouraged to sound out letters and so by the time they reach Year 1 almost all pupils are securely reaching the threshold in the phonics screening check.
- In the early years, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development has increased each year. From their starting points, all children make good progress. Many have already achieved the good level of development and the vast majority are on track to achieve this by the end of the summer term.
- Disadvantaged pupils in the early years and key stage 1 are achieving the same high standards as their classmates and better than other pupils nationally. In key stage 2, nearly all pupils are making good progress. Leaders have programmes in place for these pupils to ensure that they have the very best opportunities to reach the standards expected for their age.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the carefully planned interventions they experience. Leaders regularly monitor these to ensure that they are as effective as they can be, and make modifications where necessary. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are fully included in activities and participate well to overcome their particular challenges.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- As with the older years, the ethos in the early years is one of high expectations, good cooperation between the children and strong relationships with adults. As a result, the proportion of children with a good level of development by the end of Reception is high. Children are well prepared for Year 1.
- The early years leader has detailed understanding of each child's needs and works with colleagues to plan activities and target support precisely to ensure that strong progress is maintained. Leaders share their expertise across the trust and so good practice is being spread.
- Staff use the training they receive to evaluate their own effectiveness and improve their skills. All adults in each year group are involved in reshaping learning on a daily basis, modifying their plans based on the prior day's experience. In turn, this feeds into the regular early years staff meetings to plan for progression over the longer term.
- In Nursery, children take part in a wide variety of activities that they engage with independently, in groups or as a whole class.

- A number of children enter the early years with speech and language development needs. Staff plan activities to help all children develop these skills and, for those who need it, quickly involve speech and language therapists. Consequently, by the end of the early years almost all children have overcome their difficulties.
- Staff plan activities to improve children's fine motor skills which is resulting in better letter formation when they write. In Nursery, children are able to write their names and sound out the letters. Children write in a variety of styles, including lists, letters and, most recently, a report where they evaluated a performance of 'Cinderella' by a touring theatre company.
- By the end of Reception, children can write in full sentences using connectives, such as 'and', 'so' and 'which', and use correct punctuation. Their work is beautifully presented.
- Children talk knowledgeably about other cultures and their festivals, for example Chinese New Year and Pancake Day.
- In both Nursery and Reception, the outside area is used well to develop children's skills, including becoming more independent which is promoted through self-help skills, such as in changing for outdoor activities.
- During activities, children are attentive and ask appropriate questions. They show great curiosity and are keen to do well. Children particularly enjoy studying science and could tell inspectors about the life cycle of a frog.
- Behaviour is exemplary. Children look after one another and provide challenge and support at the right times. Children are keen to engage visitors in their explorations.
- Disadvantaged children, including those who are looked after, interact well and make the same good progress as their classmates.
- Staff are tenacious in their recording of children's progress. Staff are clear about the standards children are expected to reach and have a clear understanding of the observation and recording of children's independent learning. Assessments are moderated termly across the trust to confirm their accuracy.
- Parents are well engaged and informed about the expectations of their child and the life in school. Parents spoke to inspectors about the seamless transition arrangements from Nursery to Reception and on to Year 1.
- Staff undertake daily safety audits before the children arrive, including checking the site is secure. All the statutory welfare arrangements are in place.

School details

Unique reference number	136318
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	10000844

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	304
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Jacqueline Swain
Headteacher	Rachel Warwick
Telephone number	01726 75858
Website	www.sandyhill.org.uk
Email address	head@sandyhill.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–29 May 2012

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.
- Sandy Hill Academy is larger than average. Work is under way to increase the number of pupils the school can accommodate over the next few years.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school is part of Aspire Academy Trust, a multi-academy trust of 20 Cornish primary schools. Sandy Hill Academy is the core school for the St Austell hub and the school shares resources and some staff across the hub. The headteacher is executive principal of another school in the hub. She leads staff development across the trust.

- The trust operates through hub councillors who act as local governors and are accountable to the board of directors.
- Very few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and the first language of a small number of pupils is not English.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is around half the national average.
- The Nursery provides for children aged three and four on a part-time basis. Children in Reception attend on a full-time basis.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed lessons in all year groups, and looked at pupils' books from subjects across the curriculum and at evidence of children's work in the early years. The headteacher, head of school and assistant headteacher joined the inspectors for almost all of these activities.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, head of school (who is also the designated safeguarding lead), two hub councillors, middle leaders and the parent support assistant.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including information on pupils' attainment and progress, the school's self-evaluation, plans for improvement, minutes of the governing board, behaviour logs, attendance reports, examples of reports to parents and records relating to safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors spoke with many pupils during visits to classes and at lunchtime to hear their views of the school. Many parents were spoken to when bringing their children to school. Their views were taken into account, along with the 43 responses to Parent View.

Inspection team

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Paul Hodson	Ofsted Inspector
Alexander Baxter	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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