

Sir John Talbot's School

Tilstock Road, Whitchurch, Shropshire SY13 2BY

Inspection dates

25–26 April 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have created a culture of high expectations and positive behaviour at Sir John Talbot's School. Pupils are respectful and well behaved. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive.
- Governors have a detailed knowledge of the school and a strong strategic overview. The Marches Academy Trust's support for the school is effective and has a positive impact on many areas of the school.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. They plan their lessons carefully and ensure that there are a variety of engaging tasks which meet the needs of pupils.
- Leaders respond quickly to any weaknesses they identify. In areas where pupils' progress has been weak in the past, leaders' actions are addressing this effectively.
- Leaders' work to teach pupils about risks they face is very effective. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- Many pupils join the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills. Leaders' plans to address this are beginning to have a positive impact.
- Pupils' progress is good. Disadvantaged pupils' progress is improving quickly towards that of other pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- Post-16 students' progress is good and improving. Study programmes are carefully managed and effective. Students value highly the wide variety of opportunities that leaders offer them.
- Pupils' attendance has improved recently. However, some pupils' persistent absence remains a challenge.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to swiftly reduce the level of persistent absence, particularly that of disadvantaged pupils, by:
 - responding quickly with interventions when attendance becomes a concern for groups of pupils
 - fully evaluating the strategies used so far, including the use of pupil premium funding to address the attendance issues for disadvantaged pupils
 - establishing the most effective strategies for individual pupils
 - developing a range of strategies to secure high attendance.
- Improve progress in English by:
 - fully evaluating and embedding the recent changes made by leaders
 - carefully supporting leaders and teachers of English, especially those teachers who are new to the school.
- Further improve the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils across the school by:
 - continuing to identify pupils who need the most support
 - fully evaluating the current strategies to improve literacy to see which are the most effective, including the use of catch-up funding
 - developing all teachers' expertise in supporting pupils with low levels of confidence in literacy and numeracy.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has made many positive changes since his appointment. Sixth form pupils who have been in the school since Year 7 told inspectors all aspects of the school have improved since his arrival. He is well respected by staff and pupils because, as one teacher put it, 'He leads by example.' Another member of staff commented that, 'There has been considerable positive development of behaviour and the well-being of staff and pupils. I thoroughly enjoy my job and what the future holds.' These comments are reflective of many others from staff and parents.
- Belonging to the Marches Academy Trust brings many benefits to the school and has a positive impact on pupils. For example, because of the links with the Marches Academy Trust, the school is fully staffed with specialist teachers and attracts high-quality teachers. Leaders benefit from cross-school moderation, support for areas of weakness, professional development opportunities, observations across schools and joint planning. This collaboration has enabled the school to improve rapidly.
- Middle leaders are effective. They have a good understanding of areas of strength and weaknesses. They work collaboratively to address weaknesses and have well-developed skills in using data to make improvements. They are very positive about the professional development, coaching and support that senior leaders provide.
- Pastoral leaders are a highly effective team. They are knowledgeable about the pupils they are responsible for. Well-developed systems give them the information that they need to identify pupils' social and academic needs.
- Newly qualified teachers and trainees are very well supported by leaders at all levels in the school. They have a range of training that helps them to develop their teaching skills well. They value highly the coaching that their mentors offer and feel that they are being well prepared for their careers in teaching. They told inspectors in detail about the effective ways in which they are learning to manage pupils' behaviour, teach effective lessons, use assessment to develop well planned lessons, and safeguard pupils.
- Leaders have developed a curriculum that is flexible enough to meet the needs of pupils well. For example, in each year there is a 'parallel curriculum' for pupils who fall behind in their key mathematics and literacy skills. This curriculum allows pupils to consolidate these skills with extra tuition and support while still having access to a wide range of other subjects. This curriculum effectively allows pupils to catch up while enjoying a range of subjects.
- Fundamental British values are promoted strongly through the school parliament, community engagement and developing pupils' understanding of major world events. There is an exciting range of well attended extra-curricular activities such as archery, cooking, gardening and first aid.
- Recognising the need to increase the proportion of pupils with access to the English Baccalaureate, leaders have developed the curriculum effectively. Current pupils can now choose to study French or Spanish, alongside a broad range of other subjects. The number of pupils choosing to study a language is steadily increasing. The curriculum at

key stage 3 enables pupils to develop their key literacy and numeracy skills well, while developing skills in a range of other subjects in preparation for key stage 4.

- Leaders have recently sharpened their evaluation of pupil premium funding so that they are much more focused on the impact of the spending of the funds. While the progress of disadvantaged pupils is steadily improving, leaders acknowledge that still, more work needs to be done to evaluate the use of the pupil premium to ensure that it is fully effective, especially in addressing the barrier of weak attendance.
- The extra funding provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is spent effectively. Their needs are identified carefully, communicated comprehensively to teachers, and there is a range of support in place for these pupils which meets their needs well.
- The extra funding provided for pupils who arrive in Year 7 having fallen behind in their literacy and numeracy is beginning to have a positive impact. For example, work on phonics for pupils who need support is developing these pupils' reading skills well. This is especially the case for literacy. However, leaders need to do more work to evaluate the use of these funds fully.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a good knowledge of all aspects of the school. Some governors are relatively new to post and already have a depth of knowledge that is enabling them to have a positive impact on the leadership of the school. This knowledge enables governors to hold leaders to account in most areas.
- Governors are passionate that the school should be at the heart of its community. They support the school to do this and involve themselves strongly in the life of the school. For example, they attend awards evenings and assemblies and support community events such as the school's 10km run.
- Governors are well trained. They keep their knowledge of safeguarding up to date so that they have a strong oversight of this area and make sure that they have first-hand knowledge of the school's safeguarding procedures and incidents.
- Governors acknowledge that they need to have a stronger oversight of post-16 provision so that they can more positively impact this growing area. They have already appointed a suitably skilled governor to do this.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of a high quality. Vetting checks on staff are comprehensive. Senior leaders scrutinise these checks to ensure their accuracy.
- The designated leader for safeguarding is well qualified and knowledgeable. Many aspects of the school's work in safeguarding have been externally evaluated so leaders have an accurate, objective view of their effectiveness. Staff have comprehensive training and regular safeguarding updates.

- The curriculum plays an effective role in keeping pupils safe. Pupils have a detailed knowledge of a range of risks that might affect them. Leaders have placed much emphasis on educating pupils about local risks in particular. Pupils talked in detail about how to identify signs of radicalisation and protect themselves from extremism and child sexual exploitation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They give clear explanations and this means that pupils grasp complex concepts and gain knowledge and skills effectively.
- Pupils are clear on what is expected of them in examinations because teachers effectively teach about what a good answer looks like. For example, in one history lesson observed by inspectors, a teacher balanced independent work, model answers and pupils' prior knowledge so that pupils could write a well-reasoned, fully detailed response to an examination question.
- Pupils make good progress because teachers plan activities that are engaging and well matched to their needs. For example, in one lesson that inspectors observed, the teacher used a Hogarth painting which effectively stimulated quality discussion among pupils. In another lesson, pupils' understanding of layers of meaning was deepened when the teacher used a picture of an iceberg to demonstrate that some meanings are beneath the surface of a text.
- Teachers use a variety of approaches. Pupils respond well to this variety. For example, in some lessons teachers use quizzes, 'be the expert', teaching other pupils and competitions.
- Teachers regularly expect pupils to work collaboratively. Pupils rise to this challenge and work productively and maturely in teams. For example, in one geography lesson the task could only be completed by pupils working together, and pupils were highly engaged in their work.
- Pupils who have weak literacy skills make strong progress because, where appropriate, teachers skilfully use phonics so that they grasp basic reading strategies. Other teaching supports pupils' literacy development such as the weekly literacy focus. For example, form tutors across the school taught their tutees how to spell scientific terms, taught about antonyms and ran sessions on vocabulary development and inference. This consistent focus on literacy, alongside the daily reading programme is having a positive impact on pupils' literacy skills across the school.
- Leaders have a clear view of the assessment systems in each subject and intelligently organise interventions through a thorough analysis of teachers' assessments. Teachers follow the school's assessment and marking policy consistently.
- Where teaching assistants support teachers in lessons, they do so effectively. They have excellent relationships with pupils, know pupils well and use questioning carefully to support them.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Some parents raised concerns about the level of bullying and the way in which the school deals with it. Inspectors found no evidence to support this during the inspection. All of the pupils who spoke with inspectors said that bullying is very rare. They know who to speak if they have concerns. They are very confident that their teachers deal with the rare incidents of bullying quickly and effectively.
- The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. There is an impressive range of activities such as holocaust survivor talks, performing arts opportunities, bullying awareness drives and visits to places of worship. Pupils value these activities which they feel help them develop as people.
- Inspectors observed many examples of pupils applying themselves to difficult tasks, working collaboratively and confidently taking on the tasks the teacher gave them. Inspectors observed the way in which pupils' self-confidence increases as they progress through the school and take advantage of the variety of opportunities that are offered to them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Both in lessons and around the school, pupils behave in a mature and respectful way. They wear their smart uniforms proudly, listen to each other intently when required in lessons, and follow instructions readily.
- Attendance has improved overall, and is currently above the national average. When leaders see dips in attendance, they respond quickly. For example, one year group's attendance recently fell. Middle leaders tackled this and brought attendance back up above the national average.
- Persistent absence is still too high, but is decreasing. Leaders know this and have put in place a range of interventions to support pupils who have high absence levels. For some pupils these interventions are very effective. However, some pupils' attendance remains a concern, especially those pupils who join the school part way through the year and disadvantaged pupils.
- Although there has been a recent rise in permanent exclusions, they are used as a last resort and are rare. The number of fixed-term exclusions has risen recently but these exclusions are effective in improving pupils' behaviour. The number of repeat fixed-term exclusions is decreasing.
- The number of incidents of the use of derogatory language has decreased considerably. Pupils say that homophobic and racist language, for example, is simply unacceptable and is rare. Records evaluated by inspectors show that when incidents do occur, leaders deal with them decisively and carefully.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- A considerable number of pupils join the school from other schools across all year groups. These pupils have a range of extra needs and have often had historically low attendance. Some of these pupils have a disproportionately negative impact on the school's published progress data.
- In 2016, pupils' progress overall was in line with other pupils nationally with similar starting points. However, disadvantaged pupils, especially those with low prior attainment, made particularly weak progress overall. This was largely because of weak progress in English. However, disadvantaged pupils' progress is improving quickly and the evidence gathered by inspectors shows that current pupils are making stronger progress.
- Pupils make strong progress in a range of subjects, for example mathematics, sciences, physical education and photography. Pupils' attainment in a variety of subjects is improving year on year as pupils' behaviour and teaching improves.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, made progress in line with other pupils nationally with similar starting points. This is also true of current most-able pupils.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress in line with other pupils nationally with similar starting points. Teachers focus carefully on meeting these pupils' varying needs well.
- Leaders have identified low literacy levels as a major barrier to some pupils' success. They have established a whole-school reading programme including daily dedicated reading time. Pupils' reading habits have been positively affected, and the majority enjoy this time to read. The weakest readers' skills are improving steadily and this is having a positive impact on these pupils' progress across their subjects.
- There is no published data on destinations for this school. However, leaders closely track pupils who leave the school after Year 11. This tracking shows that all pupils who left Year 11 in 2016 went on to education, employment and training.
- In 2016, sixth form students' progress in vocational courses was very poor because of students' weak progress in ICT. Leaders have identified the reasons for this and taken quick action to improve progress for current students. The school's information shows that students on the ICT course are now making progress in line with other students nationally with similar starting points.
- Leaders have taken decisive action to improve progress in English. Year 11 classes have been restructured so that teachers can focus closely on the needs of particular pupil groups and develop the literacy skills of pupils who find English more challenging. As a result, current pupils' progress in English is much stronger.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Students are highly positive about the post-16 study programmes they are undertaking and the way in which the new sixth form leadership has developed their provision. New leaders have ensured that all students have appropriate study programmes which

include effective activities to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. For example, students enjoy their tutorial times because they do a range of activities which effectively promote their health and well-being, cultural understanding and knowledge of world affairs. Students also involve themselves in the wider life of the school. They enjoy being ambassadors for their school. One commented, 'We volunteer and none of us begrudge it because we are recognised and feel like a part of the community.'

- Students value the freedoms given to them by leaders and the facilities that they have. They work studiously and are strong role models to younger pupils. They use their social areas sensibly and enjoy very positive relationships with teachers. As one student commented, 'Staff do things they don't actually have to do and that creates a bond of respect between staff and students.'
- Outcomes in the sixth form are good. On academic courses, students make progress in line with others nationally with similar starting points. In 2016, students taking applied general courses made weak progress. Leaders have responded to this decisively and current students are making much stronger progress on these courses.
- Leaders have recently developed the careers advice and guidance that students have. All students in Year 12 are being supported to gain a high-quality work experience placement. The school's records show that these work experience placements are well monitored and risk assessed. Students enjoy university visits, apprenticeship adviser visits and one-to-one advice sessions. In 2016, the majority of students went on to higher education and all went into education or employment.
- A small number of students join the sixth form without GCSEs in English and/or mathematics. These students benefit from effective one-to-one tuition and almost all gain these qualifications before leaving the sixth form.
- Students say that they enjoy the very small classes that they have. They regularly get one-to-one or small group support in their studies which helps them to progress well. Inspectors observed lessons where small group sizes enabled detailed discussion which developed students' knowledge.

School details

Unique reference number	141176
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10032567

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 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	465
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	45
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mr A Walpole
Headteacher	Mr D O'Toole
Telephone number	01948 660 600
Website	www.sirjohntalbots.co.uk/
Email address	admin@sjttc.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

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.
- Sir John Talbot's School is a smaller than average secondary school with a small sixth form. It became an academy sponsored by the Marches Academy Trust in 2014.
- Each year, a significant number of pupils join the school in all year groups.

- The percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is above the national average.
- The percentage of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in parts of lessons across a range of subjects, spoke to pupils about their work and looked at pupils' work over time.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive officer of the academy trust, the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. Further meetings were held with pastoral leaders and faculty leaders. Inspectors also met with newly qualified teachers and trainees.
- The school's vetting procedures, single central record, personnel files and child protection documentation were evaluated. A range of other documentation was also scrutinised including information about attendance, behaviour and exclusions, plans for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, faculty tracking and action plans.
- Inspectors spoke formally and informally with pupils from all year groups and analysed 81 responses to an online pupil questionnaire. They also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and in social times around the school.
- Parents' views were considered through 42 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and free-text responses to the questions. The views of staff were considered through 39 responses to the online staff survey.

Inspection team

Dan Owen, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Dan Robinson	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqueline Newsome	Ofsted Inspector

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