

Samuel Laycock School

Broad oak Road, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire OL6 8RF

Inspection dates

19–20 September 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Strong new leaders have inherited a school that has undergone a prolonged period of turmoil. Expectations of how well pupils can achieve have dipped.
- Some pupils are not challenged sufficiently. This has resulted in them not making the progress they are capable of, particularly in writing and mathematics and for the most able.
- The assessment information gathered is unreliable and inconsistent. It does not provide an accurate overview of pupils' progress and achievements, nor are teachers using it precisely enough in the classroom to meet pupils' needs.
- Teachers do not offer enough challenge to pupils. Questions asked and feedback given do not move pupils on in their learning.
- Pupils are offered too few opportunities to be independent learners. Chances are missed to practise and strengthen skills in lessons and across the curriculum.
- Lessons do not routinely capture the interest of pupils and sometimes have little relevance to pupils' learning needs.
- Teachers do not take sufficient account of pupils' basic literacy, numeracy, communication and personal development skills in their teaching.
- Some areas of the curriculum taught are not of a good enough quality. Subjects are taught in isolation, with no reference to pupils' specific needs, abilities and interests.
- Middle leaders are not fully equipped with the skills to ensure that they are accountable and can make a valuable contribution to the whole-school drive for improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- The committed new leadership team is clear about what needs to be done, and improvements that have been put in place are beginning to take effect.
- The revamped governing body is confident in challenging leaders and makes a valuable contribution to school improvement.
- Pupils love school and are very proud to be at Samuel Laycock. They feel safe and well-cared-for. Parents agree.
- Strong relationships and pupils' positive attitudes to learning are strengths.
- The autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) base offers good-quality provision to pupils, and as a result, they make good progress.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of all pupils, including the most able.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment across the school by ensuring that teachers:
 - raise their expectations regarding what pupils can achieve, particularly in writing and mathematics
 - provide opportunities to extend and challenge pupils in their learning
 - provide more opportunities for pupils to apply their learning and develop their skills as independent learners
 - use questioning and feedback more precisely in lessons to challenge and move pupils on in their learning
 - use a consistent approach to assessment so that there is a deeper holistic understanding of pupils' learning needs and next steps
 - use assessment to plan interesting and relevant activities for pupils
 - take greater account of pupils' basic literacy, numeracy, communication and personal development skills so that they have the opportunity to practice and strengthen their skills and learning in these areas.
- Continue to improve leadership and management by making sure that leaders:
 - urgently implement a consistent and robust whole-school system to gather assessment information in all areas of the curriculum
 - improve the quality of the curriculum so that subjects are not taught in isolation and are more relevant to the learning needs of pupils
 - further develop the role of middle leaders so that they have accountability and contribute to the drive for school improvement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Samuel Laycock School has gone through a substantial period of upheaval since the last inspection. The new, dynamic senior leadership team has only been together since the beginning of this term. The new executive headteacher and head of school are experienced and knowledgeable. They have quickly and accurately identified the school's strengths and weaknesses and have started to implement change. However, these improvements are understandably in the early stages.
- There have not been high enough expectations of pupils' academic achievement or recognition of what pupils are capable of. Little challenge has been offered to pupils, including the most able. Measures are now being put in place to raise expectations and the quality of learning experiences.
- However, low expectations have not been the case everywhere in the school. The ASC base offers a good level of expectation. Pupils respond to this well and consequently make good progress throughout their time in the unit.
- Leaders do not have a sufficiently robust system to gather whole-school assessment information. As a result, it is not possible to accurately identify patterns or trends for individuals or groups of pupils. Additionally, the information is not reliable enough to measure pupils' progress over time. The data that has been collected is inconsistent because it is based on each individual teacher's personal assessment practice. A few aspects of pupils' learning are not assessed because of a misguided belief that some areas of learning are too difficult to assess. However, the new leaders are well aware of the shortcomings of the assessment information in school and are preparing to swiftly implement a rigorous whole-school system that all staff will be expected to adhere to.
- Although a full range of curriculum subjects is available to pupils, the quality is patchy. In some curriculum areas, such as physical education, forest schools and some vocational subjects, the curriculum is good. This is because the subjects are more in tune with pupils' needs and abilities. Activities are often stimulating and fun. Similarly, in the ASC base the curriculum is relevant, interesting and suitably challenging.
- However, many other subjects are not fit for purpose. This is for a number of reasons: subjects are taught in isolation without referring to the core skills that a pupil needs to develop across the whole curriculum, for example in literacy, numeracy, communication and personal development; a number of subjects in key stage 4 are taught solely against a qualification checklist which does not allow for skill development based on the abilities of each individual pupil; and assessment information is not used appropriately to gain an in-depth understanding of pupils' needs, interests and abilities. This results in some curriculum content not being sufficiently relevant, both in interest and being able to precisely meet pupils' needs.
- Senior leaders are still establishing their wider leadership team. A number of the middle and subject leaders' roles are underdeveloped. Some do not feel accountable for the whole-school development of their area of responsibility and a number do not evaluate or plan actions to improve their subjects. However, they are enthusiastic and recognise

that improvement is urgently needed. They are willing to work with the executive headteacher and head of school to rapidly improve the school.

- The use of additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not effective. This is because it does not successfully support all groups of pupils to meet their individual needs. As a result, the good academic progress of pupils throughout the school is variable.
- Leaders have quickly gained the respect of most staff, who are pleased that they have now got a stable leadership team who will support them to quickly improve. Despite the difficulties in recent years, staff, parents and pupils are committed to the school and are keen to be part of its improvement and success. Most staff feel proud to work at Samuel Laycock.
- Despite leadership changes, the fostering of the values of equality and diversity has prevailed. These values have been built on effectively by the new senior leaders. Consequently, pupils demonstrate a good capacity to be caring, considerate, respectful and tolerant of each other and of others in the wider community.
- Senior leaders know the school extremely well. The strengths and areas for improvement are identified accurately and are reflected in the detailed school development plan. Regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning have already begun and a monitoring schedule for the whole academic year established. Staff are beginning to benefit from a range of good-quality training.
- The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is woven through all the school's activities. Consequently, the school provides a calm, considerate and thoughtful environment where pupils mix happily together. Pupils are actively involved in the school community, which contributes to developing and promoting the school's and British values. For example, pupils are proud to be elected as members of the school council. Through assemblies and the curriculum, including the teaching of life skills, pupils learn about the wider community, raise funds for charities and learn about tolerance and respect for differences and the rule of law.
- Overall, disadvantaged pupils make good progress, both at the end of key stage 3 and key stage 4. Pupil premium funding is used appropriately to reduce any barriers to learning that may be experienced by this group of pupils. The progress of pupils supported by this funding is monitored. The impact of pupil premium funding is evaluated by the headteacher and governors. This enables disadvantaged pupils to be successful and be part of everything the school has to offer.
- The local authority has had intensive involvement in the school over its period of turmoil. It has worked hard to secure a strong senior leadership team and key members of the governing body. The executive headteacher also successfully leads another local special school. He and the head of school are both active members of local school networks and a larger Greater Manchester group of special schools. These schools support each other in a range of areas, for example working together to develop practice and checks with regard to assessment.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is effective. The governing body has been strengthened by a number of new governor appointments who have experience of supporting schools that

need to rapidly improve. Consequently, the governing body is now offering effective challenge and making an important contribution to raising standards in the school.

- Governors know their school well and are confident and skilled in asking challenging questions. The attributes of the individual governors have been utilised very well to ensure that their expertise benefits the school.
- The governing body has been effective in monitoring the use and impact of pupil premium funding and ensuring that it makes a difference for pupils. However, monitoring the use and impact of additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not been as effective. Consequently, not all groups of pupils achieve as well as they could.
- Governors have a good understanding of performance management procedures and support leaders effectively in ensuring the management of teachers' pay.
- The governing body is diligent in carrying out its responsibilities to safeguard pupils and, to this end, has appointed a safeguarding governor to oversee and monitor safeguarding and welfare-related matters.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is a high priority in school. Leaders have ensured that pupils have a very safe and secure environment by effectively promoting the message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- Safeguarding arrangements and security checks on staff are meticulous, and records are robust and secure. Staff and governors undertake regular and appropriate training, including that related to keeping pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism.
- A dedicated team of staff, including a family support worker, oversees the care and welfare of vulnerable pupils and families. These staff offer excellent support and are highly valued by parents.
- Leaders are persistent in cases where the school is concerned for a pupil's welfare. Good relationships with other agencies and with parents ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because there are important inconsistencies across the school.
- Expectations regarding what pupils can achieve are often too low in a number of areas of school. This affects a number of groups of pupils and is particularly, but not exclusively, noticeable in writing and mathematics.
- In lessons, teachers do not always do enough to check whether pupils are being sufficiently challenged, particularly the most able. In some lessons, pupils rarely get anything wrong and there is little expectation that they will complete an acceptable amount or finish work. Consequently, pupils miss out on being stretched further or extended in their learning.
- In too many lessons, pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to apply their learning and

try out independently some of the skills and knowledge they have. The feedback offered to pupils to help them do this, whether through the questions adults ask in a lesson or comments about their work, lacks detail to support pupils to learn from their mistakes and to progress to their next step in learning.

- The day-to-day assessment systems that teachers use vary across the whole school. As a result, teachers have a very fragmented understanding of pupils based only on their own method of assessment. Teachers rarely use any whole-school holistic knowledge of a pupil to inform their planning. Consequently, the information they have to help them plan pertinent, stimulating learning experiences for pupils lacks rigour. Additionally, some teachers' daily assessment within a lesson is not precise enough to pinpoint pupils' exact ongoing learning needs. As a result, teachers do not always provide work that meets pupils' personalised needs, nor does it help them move on to the next step in their learning.
- Across a number of subjects, teachers miss opportunities to develop key basic skills relevant to individual pupils. Too little attention is placed on a pupil's personal goals in literacy, numeracy, communication and personal development and how these can be developed and built upon across every area of the curriculum. Consequently, pupils are not getting a continuity of learning experiences and benefiting from the chance to practice and strengthen their skills and learning.
- The new leadership team has a good understanding of the teaching, learning and assessment across the school and has used this information very effectively to pinpoint the changes and improvements that need to be made. For example, the team has quickly introduced a whole-school system for setting learning objectives in a lesson, insisting that lessons be broken down into three levels of difficulty. It has also set up an expectation that learning is evaluated by pupils in each lesson. All staff have implemented these changes. Leaders are now working towards ensuring the quality and consistency of these strategies.
- The quality of teaching and learning is strongest in the ASC base, in the aspects of learning related to preparing pupils for readiness to work and in 'forest schools'. This is because lessons are well planned and provide pupils with positive learning opportunities over the year. Although forest school is still in its infancy, staff have been well trained, timetables are carefully organised and staff and pupils are enthusiastic. Pupils returning from a session explained to inspectors, 'It's brilliant, we get to do lots of things to help us think and work with each other well'. Crucially, this programme is linked to the holistic targets identified in pupils' education, health and care plans. Lessons are also focused on supporting pupils' social and emotional development.
- In the ASC base, there is a greater clarity of teaching and learning. Activities are planned to closely meet the needs of pupils and provide opportunities to extend and challenge them. They encourage pupils to talk about their learning and pick up on the interests of pupils to create stimulating, fun lessons. For example, pupils enjoy a variety of multi-media projects that teach skills such as computer programming, animation, time-lapse filming and photography.
- Despite a number of lessons not meeting pupils' needs, the vast majority of pupils have a very positive attitude to learning and are ready and eager in lessons. This is because there are strong positive relationships between adults and pupils. Adults foster trusting and respectful relationships in school and pupils respond by openly displaying their

pleasure and happiness at being at Samuel Laycock. They are proud of their school and feel very safe and secure to learn. A parent describing the school as being 'a life saver' for their child was a typical sentiment.

- The vast majority of parents who responded to Parent View or spoke to inspectors in the playground felt that their children are taught well and their child makes good progress in school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The importance placed on pupils' personal development and welfare is very visible in school. Staff and governors are conscientious in their responsibility to ensure that the school provides a safe, nurturing environment in which pupils can flourish and grow in confidence.
- Staff treat pupils with the highest consideration and ensure that the school makes everyone feel welcome and valued. Adults model respectful and caring behaviour in the way they engage with pupils. As a result, pupils are happy and calm and behave in a similar caring way.
- The confidence and sense of well-being demonstrated by pupils is striking and a strength of the school. For example, pupils' demeanour around school was one of pride and maturity. Many were confident and keen to talk to the inspectors, offering a hand to shake and beaming smiles. A typical comment was that they hoped inspectors were 'enjoying being in the school as much we do, we love it'.
- Most parents spoken to by inspectors and those who responded to Parent View expressed praise for the school and the work of the staff. Parents felt that their children were safe, happy and well-looked-after. A number of parents were keen to say that they felt the school was 'fantastic' and that their children are thriving. They were impressed with how much their children love school. They put this down to the staff's skills at nurturing and building their child's confidence. A number of parents mentioned the good-quality transition support that they and their child receive. Time is spent ensuring that children and families have a positive experience and feel welcomed when they join the school and confident and self-assured when moving on to their next stage of education.
- The vast majority of pupils are positive, happy learners. Pupils told inspectors that they liked their school very much and said that they were well-looked-after by adults. They said staff were 'kind' and 'help you learn'. Pupils were clear in their view that they felt safe in school and described it as an 'awesome' and 'friendly' place to be.
- Personal and social education is taught throughout school, although leaders are rightly reviewing this area of the curriculum to ensure that there is a robust and consistent means to assess the progress pupils make. This will ensure that skills and development can be more closely aligned to pupils' individual needs and taught as a core skill across the whole curriculum.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Leaders have been very successful in addressing some of the behaviour issues of the recent past by ensuring that all staff share a responsibility for managing behaviour.
- Pupils are aware of how to behave and conduct themselves well around school. They are polite and well mannered, open doors for each other and adults and are keen to ask how visitors are 'enjoying their day'.
- The school's records show that incidents of inappropriate behaviour do occur but are now infrequent. This, in part, is due to the expertise of adults in supporting pupils with their behaviour. For example, at playtimes adults expertly and subtly intervened in pupils' interactions if they looked like they might have the potential to escalate. They were also quick to intervene and help pupils talk through misunderstandings so that pupils had a greater understanding of the situation they were in and the point of view of another.
- Pupils' attitude to learning is impressive and a strength. Pupils try their utmost to engage in lessons. Pupils listen carefully to adults and try hard to concentrate on the activities that they are set. This is despite many lessons lacking in interest or not being correctly pitched to meet the needs of pupils.
- Attendance is currently above that of other pupils nationally in special schools. The systems for monitoring absence are meticulous and robust. The family support worker and attendance officer work closely together to provide good-quality liaison between families, the school and professionals that can offer support to those who need it. Good attendance is rewarded and has a high profile in school. There are a group of pupils who are persistently absent. They are picked up quickly and leaders have worked hard with this group of pupils and their parents, with some notable successes.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The school's information on attainment and progress is unreliable. The assessment systems that leaders have inherited do not support an accurate understanding of pupils' achievement, nor the progress that they make during the year.
- All pupils join the school with skills which are well below those typical for others of their age. All are diagnosed with moderate learning difficulties, and many have additional needs including autistic spectrum disorder. From inspection evidence, including that seen in pupils' work books and files, outcomes for pupils are uneven across the school.
- By the end of key stage 3, some pupils, including the most able, make limited academic progress from the standards they achieved at the end of key stage 2 in their previous school, particularly in writing and mathematics. This is because teachers do not use assessment information effectively enough to plan precisely the next steps in pupils' learning. It is also because the academic targets set for pupils offer little challenge.
- At the end of key stage 4, pupils work toward functional skills and entry-level qualifications. A small number are entered for GCSEs. Although the vast majority of

pupils gain a level of accreditation, they are not achieving as well as they could do, including the most able, because of the lag in progress in key stage 3 and ineffective use of assessment information which continues through key stage 4.

- However, the picture of underachievement is not everywhere in the school. In the specialist ASC base, stronger day-to-day assessment information is gathered and the curriculum is tailored more closely to pupils' needs. Inspection evidence, including a scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that these pupils make good progress.
- From their individual starting points, pupils who are disadvantaged and children who are looked after make better progress than their peers. This is as a result of the support that they are offered, a more personalised curriculum and the greater consistency in monitoring their progress and achievements.
- When pupils join the school, a number have reading skills below those expected for their age. Reading is a high priority in school. There are a good range of age-appropriate books available to read. Pupils benefit from a regular opportunity to read with an adult and supportive interventions to help them improve. It is recognised in school that good reading skills are a means by which pupils can be more successful in their work across the curriculum.
- Pupils achieve and make good progress in subjects such as physical education (PE) and in personal development. Most pupils achieve a qualification in PE and visibly enjoy the opportunities that they are given to engage in sport. As a result, the school and individuals are often successful when entering competitions and sporting events. Pupils were proud to share their national achievements in, for example, football and athletics. Pupils make strong progress in their personal development. This is evident in their confidence and enthusiasm for school life. The addition of forest schools into the curriculum has provided an excellent opportunity for pupils to achieve in personal skills such as self-esteem, teamwork and leadership. For example, a group of Year 11 pupils were brimming with excitement when telling the inspector how much they had enjoyed their morning working together to build a den, and then a fire.
- Leaders have put in place opportunities for a greater range of vocational subjects to be taught, starting with a series of taster sessions to identify pupils' interests and aptitudes. This in turn is intended to increase the range and relevance of qualifications on offer to pupils.
- The school provides good-quality careers guidance, which helps pupils to make informed choices about what they want to do when they leave school. Transitions are well organised and managed. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to build up their confidence in, and familiarity with, the placement they are moving to. School records indicate that those who have moved to post-16 destinations have successfully sustained their placements.

School details

Unique reference number	106280
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	10024469

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	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Carey Flint
Headteacher	Andrew Foord (executive headteacher) Alison Randall (head of school)
Telephone number	0161 344 1992
Website	www.samuellaycock.org.uk
Email address	andrew.foord@samuellaycock.tameside.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	March 2014

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. A number have additional learning needs such as autistic spectrum disorder.
- At the time of the inspection there were 109 students on roll. All have an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is low.
- Boys considerably outnumber girls.
- Around half of all pupils on roll are identified as disadvantaged.
- The school moved to its current site in September 2011 and is co-located with a large secondary academy.

- The school provides a before-school breakfast club, which can be accessed by all pupils.
- A small number of students in key stage 4 attend alternative education provision with Works4U.
- The school has had an executive headteacher since April 2017. He also leads another local special school. A new head of school has recently been appointed to Samuel Laycock. She took up post at the beginning of the autumn term, two weeks prior to this inspection.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in classes. They observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and assessed the school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Inspectors also observed pupils in the playground and during lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books and files.
- Inspectors held meetings with the executive headteacher, head of school, assistant headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, the lead for safeguarding, the lead for attendance and the family support worker. They also spoke to the person responsible for the ASC base, those responsible for work experience and monitoring alternative provision and curriculum leaders.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair. A meeting was also held with a representative of the local authority and visiting external careers adviser.
- A small group of pupils discussed their opinions about the school and their learning with inspectors, and inspectors also spoke informally with pupils in the playground and around school.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- They also took account of the seven responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. An inspector talked briefly with a few parents at the beginning and end of the school day.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including: minutes from meetings of the governing body; information on pupils' progress; the school's evaluation of its own performance and its development plan. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

Ann Gill

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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