

Seaford Head School

Arundel Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 4LX

Inspection dates

13–14 September 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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Senior and middle leaders, teachers and support staff all work cohesively under the headteacher's successful leadership. Pupils flourish on all three sites.
- The headteacher has raised the importance of staff's and pupils' well-being so that they continue to be successful and enjoy school life.
- Astute governors are fully involved in the school's activities and development. They celebrate the school's successes but are determined to see yet more improvements in the future.
- GCSE examination results have risen for the last three years, especially for disadvantaged pupils and the most able. The proportion of pupils who achieve grades A* to C at GCSE is higher than the national average.
- Support for vulnerable pupils, disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and children looked after is planned very carefully. Guidance is sensitive and thoughtful so these pupils' learning and pastoral needs are met most successfully.
- The majority of parents support the school enthusiastically. A small number rarely attend events or parents' evenings and are less well involved in supporting their children's education.
- Teachers' specialist subject knowledge, their enthusiasm for teaching and commitment to pupils' learning are evident in all classes. They use accurate assessment of pupils' progress to help them to improve their work.
- The great majority of pupils behave extremely well in lessons and around the school. Excellent alternative programmes are in place for those who struggle with academic work or find mainstream school life difficult.
- The sixth form is gathering momentum in its fourth year, with an increasing number of students and improving results generated by strong leadership and teaching. A-level achievement varies between subjects, so results are not as securely outstanding as in the main school. Students mature into thoughtful young adults.
- A team of dedicated staff, highly rated by the local authority, makes sure that all safeguarding arrangements are in place. Pupils feel very safe at school.
- English teachers, supported by all other staff, improve pupils' vocabulary, reading and writing fluency very well in all years. There is not such a determined push to reinforce pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the use of numeracy skills in all subjects so that pupils practise and apply them and appreciate how relevant they are to many aspects of their future lives.
- Persevere with work to strengthen parents' involvement with school life.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- When he took up post, the headteacher realised that many aspects of the school's work were already flourishing. He took time to consider where there was scope for improvement to make pupils' and staff's experience of Seaford Head even better. He acted thoughtfully and introduced a focus on staff and pupils' well-being and sharper expectations for behaviour.
- Staff now have a well-being committee. It is not surprising that practically all of them who responded to the questionnaire feel well supported, knowing that leaders are considerate of their work-life balance. Staff morale is very high, both for teachers and those in other roles, and for very experienced staff as well as those new to the school. This generates a happy yet purposeful atmosphere around the school, which pupils sense and appreciate.
- The senior leadership team, made up of seven assistant headteachers and the business manager, is very effective and successful. All members bring different expertise and wisdom to their work, complement each other's skills and collaborate extremely well. Middle leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and support staff are also equally united in their determination to do their best for pupils and students.
- The headteacher is strict about behaviour in lessons, but pupils appreciate that the rules are clear. The school's no-nonsense approach to managing behaviour has contributed to the predominantly outstanding behaviour in lessons. High expectations are also woven into pupils' knowledge and understanding of fundamental British values, such as democracy, tolerance and empathy. This work complements the school's excellent provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The very few subjects that had relatively disappointing results in 2016 all improved in 2017. Senior and middle leaders, along with other staff, work together to identify the reasons for any drop in standards. Middle leaders combine excellent teaching with leadership and support for their teams. They and all staff receive and contribute to high-quality training which benefits them and their pupils.
- Based on excellent transition arrangements, Year 7 pupils start in the right class groups and cover work that matches their stages of learning. Subject specialists teach a small group of Year 7 pupils in a nurture group so that they gain confidence as they adjust to secondary school.
- The provision known as 'the hub' is for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion because they have poor behaviour or attitudes to learning, for example. They receive thoughtfully considered flexible learning and successful programmes. These may incorporate attending a forest school off-site or working for arts awards.
- Funds received for disadvantaged pupils or for Year 7 pupils eligible for catch-up funding are spent wisely. Senior and middle leaders make sensible adjustments, having reviewed the success of the actions taken compared with the costs and value for money. Pupils' reading ages improve fast and pupils catch up with their basic numeracy skills well.
- Well-planned subject choices and pathways from Year 9 upwards range from studying

all the EBacc subjects to tailored approaches suitable for some pupils where fewer of them are combined with work-related courses. A life-skills course gives those with particular learning issues one-to-one help, in small groups with specialist teachers and experienced teaching assistants. The curriculum is rich. Option subjects offered at GCSE aim to meet the interests and aspirations of as many pupils as possible. The large number of extra-curricular sports, clubs and activities, plus the enrichment programme, complement and extend the curriculum very well.

- Many parents wrote complimentary comments about the school, describing how impressed they were by 'the enthusiastic teaching staff and the quality of education students receive'. One summed up by saying, 'Great communication and the real feeling that the school knows your child'. The headteacher holds coffee mornings for parents and has an afternoon a week for them to drop in. However, the school has not been effective in engaging a small number of parents in supporting their children's learning.

Governance of the school

- Members of the governing body, several of whom are also trustees, support the school enthusiastically and successfully. They have a one-committee structure, as all of them want to know about every aspect of the school's work. The headteacher gives them informative reports which they discuss in detail. They do not shy away from asking probing questions or raising concerns. In recent years, for example, they have explored actions to support disadvantaged pupils' progress or considered how best to develop the new sixth form.
- Governors attend many school events. They also meet staff to review aspects of the school's work and then share their findings with the full governing body. They check that additional funds, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are spent correctly and that policies are up to date. Several governors are past or present parents and all of them bring useful expertise, such as in finance or higher education, to the work they do to make the school even better.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. For all three sites, leaders and governors regularly consider the reliability of the school's safeguarding arrangements. These could be, for example, to support children looked after or the specific needs of those with a physical disability, or about fire safety. The school's policies are up to date. However, the headteacher knows that providing all staff with regular training and information is what matters. Leaders check that staff have a good understanding of types of abuse and neglect to watch out for. It is clear that staff at all levels know the early signs that raise concerns about pupils' safety, whom to contact and to act immediately.
- There are several ways for pupils to raise any concerns they have about themselves or others, but mostly they go to student services staff. The experienced safeguarding officer has identified risks within the local community, such as substance misuse and child exploitation; Year 10 pupils have had lessons on these sensitive topics.

- All members of staff who responded to the questionnaire agreed that pupils are safe at the school. The very great majority of parents feel the school does a good job in keeping their children safe. Underpinning the priority governors and leaders give to safeguarding, the curriculum is well planned to educate pupils and students about risks they may face now and in the future. Parents are also offered sessions on how they can identify activities, such as sexting, that children might do without realising the possible risks to their safety. Sexting was an assembly topic for all pupils last year. The school liaises regularly with its local primary schools on safeguarding matters.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Inspectors visited a wide range of lessons in many subjects at all three sites. Features of teaching which contributed to the predominantly outstanding learning included:
 - teachers’ in-depth knowledge of the subject and enjoyment of teaching it, occasionally accompanied by charismatic or inspirational delivery
 - interesting resources and excellent planning and seating arrangements so that pupils work well together
 - concepts introduced at the right level, with clear explanations and deep exploration of pupils’ understanding
 - effective evaluation of pupils’ progress to spot where intervention is needed
 - helpful guidance for pupils, often during lessons, on how they could improve
 - teaching assistants who know the pupils really well and therefore give them the right level of support
 - ‘learn by doing, not just copying stuff’, as one pupil contributed when discussing lessons that they enjoy.
- English teachers encourage pupils to understand texts fully and the most able pupils to identify layers of meaning. From the start of Year 7, they help pupils to annotate texts and to improve punctuation and spelling. In addition, the development of pupils’ reading and writing permeates many lessons in different subjects. Teachers extend pupils’ vocabulary by exploring subject-specific words.
- Pupils’ numeracy skills are secure and their GCSE examination results in mathematics are above the national average. However, they do not use these skills as often as they could in other subjects, in ways that deepen their mastery of mathematics. This is important, especially for those pupils considering A levels in subjects such as business studies, physics or computer studies.
- Pupils, students and parents have access to much practical and useful information on the school’s website. They can find subject content for each year alongside many reference documents, video clips and lesson plans. This means that pupils can often see what they are missing if they are absent or find support materials when revising.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. A member of staff has undertaken enhanced training to promote pupils' mental health. Pupils' requests about the content of personal, social and health education (PSHE) topics are taken on board. Leaders and governors also believe that understanding about mental health is important for pupils' well-being. Some classes have started working on a mindfulness course this term.
- Inspectors explored the support put in place for children who are looked after, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and others who may be vulnerable. Discussions with those involved and individual pupils made it clear that many members of staff, with a range of welfare roles, do everything possible to support these pupils.
- Further contributing to pupils' well-being are the highly effective, well-established links with the local primary schools. Year 7 pupils spend a full week at Seaford Head at the end of their last term in primary school, culminating in a celebration shared with their parents. In September, they are familiar with their surroundings and know their teachers – a positive start to their secondary education. In all years, pupils 'move up' in the preceding summer term.
- If staff hear about any pupil making a thoughtless or unacceptable remark, they will not let it pass. They respond fast to the tiny number of behavioural, bullying or racist incidents. In 2016, a small number of pupils reported that they had been upset by 'being seen as different'. Staff dealt with the situation firmly and effectively. A couple of cyber-bullying incidents were confronted equally well. One pupil observed that they learn about e-safety 'in many computing lessons'.
- The PSHE programme, ethics lessons, form time and assemblies contribute very well both to pupils' welfare and to preparing them for their future lives. They discuss sensitive issues such as different family structures, homophobia or extremism and welcome the information they now receive about mental health. An extra layer of support is the inclusion room, set up in 2014. Here, pupils, possibly at risk of exclusion, receive skilful help to keep them in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They move around the school and between sites sensibly. They are keen to learn and stay focused in lessons, help each other and get on well when working independently. Just occasionally, one or two pupils may 'switch off' for a few moments, but it is extremely rare that a lesson does not proceed smoothly and successfully. Pupils contribute much to this by how receptive they are, willingly answering questions or buckling down to work. In the questionnaire, only one member of staff did not agree that pupils' behaviour is at least good.
- The school's target has yet to be reached, but attendance in 2017 was just above the national 2016 figure for secondary schools. The number of persistent absentees reduced further to below the 2016 figure and the difference between disadvantaged

pupils and others narrowed. However, in 2017, pupils who had education, health and care plans did not attend as well as others. The education welfare officer and other staff are concentrating their efforts on these pupils, along with those who are disadvantaged.

- Holidays and unauthorised absence in term time have increased, with many parents taking four days' holiday, as only five or more days generates a fine. The school has plans to tackle this, and the assistant headteacher overseeing attendance continues to be relentless in her determination to improve attendance further.
- Talking to pupils attending the hub and examining their work, it is clear that the extremely skilful staff who work with them are successful in improving their behaviour and helping them to understand how to care for their well-being or how to work harmoniously with others. The school keeps a careful eye on the few pupils attending off-site provision. Providers ring the school if a pupil is absent and liaise with staff about work, particularly mock examinations. Seaford staff visit the providers each half term and are in regular telephone and email contact as needed.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- The inspection took place very early in the academic year. Nevertheless, it was clear that pupils had got off to a flying start. They were making outstanding progress, whether well into their GCSE courses or working with their almost-new teachers in Year 7.
- Despite a very small percentage-point drop in 2017, the proportion of pupils attaining both English and mathematics GCSE standard passes was above national figures. Results have been similar in recent years and pupils make very good progress over time. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest available grades rose in 2017 when compared with 2016 results.
- In 21 of the 25 GCSE examination subjects taken, the proportion of pupils achieving good pass grades was above the provisional 2017 national averages, particularly in English language and literature, mathematics, French, Spanish and media studies. Science GCSE results were exceptionally high. This summer, over 60 pupils took the separate science subjects, achieving well above average grades.
- After careful monitoring of progress, leaders target resources for disadvantaged pupils, and those eligible for catch-up funding, carefully. Last year they allocated funds to employ additional specialist teachers in English and mathematics so that class sizes were reduced for these pupils or they received intervention support. Funds paid for transport for some Year 11 pupils to be sure that they took their examinations. Disadvantaged pupils have made accelerated progress in each of the last three years, so the differences between them and other pupils nationally have diminished and are small.
- In 2016, a small number of middle-attaining disadvantaged pupils had poor outcomes due to exceptional personal situations. Leaders continue to keep a careful eye on this group's achievement, determined to erase differences remaining in a few subjects.
- Following a push for them to achieve their best, the most able pupils did extremely well in 2016 and 2017. Similarly, pupils who attend the hub make excellent progress in their

response to school life and in the carefully selected courses that they study. They make very good progress when undertaking activities such as spending a day at a local land-based college,

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those following a life skills programme, make strong progress. In 2016 they almost achieved the progress measures for all pupils nationally in English, mathematics and science. Close to one third of these pupils attained a standard pass in GCSE mathematics in 2017.
- With increasingly high outcomes, a keen focus on literacy skills and high-quality provision for their wider education, pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. Practically all pupils move into education, employment or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Since it opened in 2014, the sixth form has matured as the number of students joining from Year 11 and other schools has more than doubled. Its increasing popularity is down to its reputation for excellent teaching, improving results, and parents and students realising that further education is now established in Seaford.
- The sixth-form leader is skilful, enthusiastic and ambitious for students. She has the experience and skills to help students to achieve their best. All aspects of the provision are strong. Governors support the sixth form with a keen interest and want to serve the local community well. Students appreciate and benefit from all of the effective features of teaching, learning and assessment seen in the main school. They are taught in an equally supportive environment. Specialists deliver challenging work, matching the students' maturity and underpinned by the expectation that students will study hard. Practically all of them do.
- The curriculum continues to evolve as a pattern of students' aspirations and interests emerges. This year, many more subjects, including mathematics, sciences and humanities, have at least 10 students studying them. Several BTEC level 3 courses are planned for 2018. External speakers contribute much to the provision for students' personal development.
- Students have the chance to participate in a wealth of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and World Challenge. Students volunteer in school and the local community. The school often manages to match students' academic courses with the work experience they undertake.
- Five students attained the extended project qualification in 2017 and A-level results in 2017 were similar to those in 2016. Results in examinations taken at the end of Year 12 also improved. These outcomes represented good progress for the 2017 student cohort.
- In the first two years, A-level examination results have reflected good progress in several subjects such as English, mathematics and the sciences. A few of the most able pupils did not do as well as expected, so they are a focus group this year. Governors and leaders agree that the sixth form is not yet outstanding. The consistency in progress between subjects and results is not yet firmly established but each year it improves.
- Staff systematically monitor students' progress alongside their personal development.

Care, guidance and support for sixth formers are as strong as they are in the main school. Staff fully support the few students who miss lessons for personal reasons and they achieve the qualifications they need for their future plans. Students' well-being is a very high priority, and this year, students have discussed mental health and the 'mind-set' of a good, but not stressed, A-level student.

- All students are supported well and receive valuable advice to develop their plans and to achieve their goals. Careers education is very good. As necessary, English and mathematics skills are nurtured but only a very small number of GCSE English and/or mathematics retakes are needed in Year 12; results are good. Retention between Years 12 and 13 is high. In 2017, over 70% of Year 13 students went on to university and almost all the rest went on to apprenticeships, work or planned gap years.

School details

Unique reference number	138473
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10036932

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1,291
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	132
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jon Dilley
Headteacher	Bob Ellis
Telephone number	01323 891623
Website	www.seafordhead.org
Email address	reception@seafordhead.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This larger than average-sized school converted to academy status in September 2012. The sixth form opened in September 2014. The headteacher was appointed in April 2016.
- The school is on three sites. Arundel, the main one, is the base for Years 9 to 11; Steyne, half a mile away, is where Years 7 and 8 have all their lessons; and the sixth form has a base in a building across the road from Steyne. Pupils in Years 9 to 11 have physical education, music and some science lessons at the Steyne site.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average overall but a higher than national proportion of pupils have a statement of

special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. A small group of these pupils follow a life skills course blended with mainstream lessons.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the percentage seen nationally. However, it varies between year groups with, for example, over 30% in the present Year 9 and under 20% in Year 10.
- In most years, around 40 Year 7 pupils are eligible for catch-up funding (for those who did not attain level 4 in English or mathematics at the end of primary school).
- More than nine out of 10 pupils are of a White British background. A well-below-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The school's inclusion room is for specialists to teach a small number of pupils who need support to flourish in mainstream classes. They also support a few pupils at risk of permanent exclusion.
- Fewer than 10 pupils, most of whom are in Year 11, attend off-site alternative provision at Plumpton College one day a week. They follow animal care and related agricultural courses. The school also sends pupils to South Downs College for courses such as hair and beauty.
- 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.
- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in close to 40 lessons, including form time in the morning, and attended two assemblies. Several of the lessons were joint observations with senior leaders, with whom inspectors also toured the school and dropped into lessons for a few minutes. Inspectors looked at pupils' books in lessons. They visited the hub and the inclusion room.
- Inspectors met pupils and students informally as they visited parts of the school during breaktimes. They also held meetings with groups of pupils from several years, including a small group of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Discussions were held with staff including senior and middle leaders and those managing on-site alternative provision. The lead inspector met the chair of governors (also the chair of the board of trustees) and two other governors. She also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took into account 41 staff and 124 parents' responses (less than 10%) to questionnaires. With only 29 pupils answering their questionnaire, inspectors considered those that all pupils in Years 8, 9 and 11 had completed in school in the last academic year. Of the parents who contributed to the free-text option of the Parent View questionnaire, about 25 of them wrote detailed comments.

Inspection team

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Peter Swan	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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