

Cedars Upper School

Mentmore Road, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 2AE

Inspection dates

3–4 October 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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They take effective action to improve areas of weakness.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good overall. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and positive relationships with pupils help pupils to make good progress.
- Where teaching that is not good exists, leaders take effective action to improve it. This has not yet had a full impact, particularly in science.
- Pupils achieve particularly well in mathematics. Across the school, most pupils achieve at least as well as their peers nationally.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They work hard and treat others with respect and courtesy.
- Leaders' work to promote the well-being of pupils is good. Leaders provide clear guidance to help pupils make informed choices about their future education and career.
- Provision in the sixth form is good. Sixth-form students are well taught and they make good progress.
- Leaders' work to secure pupils' safety is effective. Pupils are safe and feel safe.
- The curriculum supports pupils to make good progress. Leaders ensure that what is taught suits the needs of pupils with different starting points.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress in English and mathematics. Across the curriculum, the difference between the progress they make and the progress of other pupils nationally is becoming smaller.
- Most pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities now make better progress than in previous years. Leaders' actions to support these pupils are effective. However, in some subjects, these pupils do not make progress in line with their peers.
- Absence and exclusion rates for disadvantaged pupils, and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are higher than for other pupils in the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress that pupils make by:
 - continuing to diminish the difference between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and that of other pupils nationally
 - continuing to develop strategies to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that they make similar progress to all pupils nationally with similar starting points
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school, and particularly in science, is consistently good.
- Increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders take effective action to ensure that all pupils in the school succeed. They review teaching and learning to target the support they give. Senior leaders provide teachers and middle leaders with mentoring, as well as opportunities to observe good practice. As a result, the standard of teaching across the school is improving. Most teaching is good and some is better.
- Subject leaders' development plans are based on the overall strategic plan for the school. Plans are adjusted in light of examination results. Consequently, middle leaders and teachers have a clear focus on what the school needs to do better. This leads directly to better outcomes for pupils. For example, weak outcomes in A-level English and psychology in 2016 have improved in 2017, and a dip in results in A-level mathematics in 2016 is reversing.
- Following last year's staff development programme, improvements were identified in a range of subjects, including humanities, mathematics, drama, English, sociology, psychology and business studies. Some teachers who benefited last year from the training are now leading training sessions for others. Leaders provide a culture of continuous improvement so that the quality of teaching continues to develop further. 95% of staff who responded to Ofsted's questionnaire agreed that leaders use professional development to challenge and support teachers' improvement.
- The well-designed curriculum builds on what pupils already know and can do. As a result, the curriculum meets the needs of pupils well. For example, most pupils study two languages from arrival in Year 9. Those pupils who study only one language have extra lessons in arts, performance and technology. During key stage 4, pupils are guided through a range of choices to ensure that they follow courses which enable them to succeed. Most pupils follow subjects to which they are well suited. As a result, they make good progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is promoted effectively in lessons, assemblies and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils consider poverty while studying 'Of Mice and Men'. They learn about challenge and gain new skills in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Through participating in exchanges to France and Spain, alongside a range of other trips and visits, pupils develop an understanding of different places and cultures. Pupils have wide-ranging experiences which help them to understand the world around them.
- Leaders accurately identify groups of pupils who are doing less well and put support in place for them. For example, leaders have made good use of pupil premium funding to employ learning mentors to help disadvantaged pupils to make good progress in English and mathematics. Adaptations to the curriculum enable pupils with low starting points, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, to make improved progress. Significant groups of pupils now make better progress than they did in 2015 and 2016.
- Leaders' effective use of funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved the progress many of these pupils make. For example, the use of teaching assistants to work with pupils over time helps pupils to succeed. Leaders

have adjusted the curriculum for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many of these pupils now make progress in line with all pupils in the school.

- However, in a minority of subjects, including science, teaching for this significant group of pupils is not as strong and they make less progress.
- Leaders' support for disadvantaged pupils is improving the progress they make in English and mathematics. It is not yet improving their attendance or sufficiently improving the progress they make in science.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a good understanding of the priorities of the school. They use their own analysis of pupils' attainment data to identify trends in the performance of the school and to influence improvement planning. Governors receive regular updates on the impact of leaders' work and hold leaders to account to ensure that their actions are effective.
- Governors put pupils at the heart of their work. They monitor the expenditure of the school closely to ensure that money is not wasted. They ensure that the financial resources of the school are used on school improvement priorities, such as the learning mentors who support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, leaders are able to improve the school.
- Governors visit the school regularly to review safeguarding practices. They receive regular updates on child protection and look for patterns and trends. They review the annual safeguarding audit with school leaders. Governors are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that staff know how to keep pupils safe. Staff receive training on issues such as anxiety, resilience, radicalisation and neglect. They are given regular updates on matters of local or national concern, and they know how to pass on any concerns they have about pupils.
- Through lessons and assemblies, pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe. They know who to talk to in school if they are worried.
- There is a clear focus on issues which might affect pupils at this school. After identifying that one of the biggest concerns for pupils was examination stress, leaders provided courses on how to reduce this.
- Leaders develop strong partnerships with external agencies. They secure timely help for pupils. For example, leaders ran a pilot programme in conjunction with child and adolescent mental health practitioners. Pupils who have mental health needs are now assessed much more quickly than they used to be.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching across the school is supported by positive relationships between teachers and pupils. One pupil commented to an inspector, 'If I were in a marathon, my teachers would be cheering me.' Pupils typically have confidence that their teachers want them to succeed. Teachers have created an environment which is conducive to learning.
- Leaders effectively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of teaching, learning and assessment and then develop a structured programme of staff development. Teachers focus throughout the year on aspects of their work which they need to develop. For example, some teachers are currently examining how to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities more effectively. Others are developing their skills to help the most able pupils to make better progress. As a result, good practice is enhanced and teaching across the school is improving.
- Teachers across the school have strong subject knowledge. They are able to help pupils develop high-level knowledge and understanding. Where learning is most effective, teachers make work particularly challenging for pupils. Pupils respond well to this. They work hard to meet teachers' high expectations and make substantial progress.
- Questioning is often used well to draw out pupils' knowledge and to make them think. This consolidates and deepens pupils' knowledge and understanding. They make good progress as a result.
- Across the school, teachers make effective use of information about pupils to target support to pupils who need it most. Teaching assistants work well with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and by most pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving in a range of subjects.
- In many lessons, teachers use an accurate understanding of pupils' prior learning to match the work they set to pupils' needs. Pupils in these lessons usually learn effectively.
- In some subjects, such as mathematics, the strengths identified above are consistently present in all teaching. Across the curriculum, they are not always evident. Where teaching is not as strong, such as in science, pupils do not make as much progress as they should.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are safe. They are taught how to keep themselves safe. They learn about topics such as e-safety, cyber bullying and radicalisation. They are taught to be resilient and how to relax to overcome examination stress. As a result of this good support, pupils are able look after their own welfare.
- Pupils feel safe. They speak of the school as being a safe place to be. They are positive about teachers asking about their well-being and about a high staff presence

preventing poor behaviour. Bullying is infrequent. When it does happen, pupils know who to talk to about it. They know it will be dealt with in a timely and effective fashion by teachers.

- Leaders promote inclusivity. There is a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender support group, for example. Pupils know that teachers will not tolerate discriminatory behaviour. As a result, instances of discrimination are rare.
- Form tutors play a key role in ensuring that pupils are well prepared for the next step in their education or career. Form tutors interview pupils to help them choose appropriate subjects to study. This is followed by a careers interview for pupils who need one.
- In the sixth form, leaders meet students to match their skills to career goals. Students spend guided time planning for their futures. They are helped to apply for university places, apprenticeships and employment. Almost all pupils completing Year 11 stay in education, employment or training. At the end of Year 13, the proportion of students who stay in education, employment or training is in line with the national average.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They are willing to listen and to try. They form good relationships with their teachers.
- Pupils respond particularly well when the work they are set is challenging. Their good behaviour supports the good progress they make.
- The school is calm and orderly. Pupils conduct themselves well in and out of lessons. They are helpful to visitors. For example, one pupil offered to get safety goggles for an inspector visiting a science lesson. Others were happy to provide directions around the school.
- Pupils treat each other with respect. Pupils are confident that all forms of discrimination are rare and dealt with well by staff. Pupils are confident to be themselves.
- Leaders use a range of strategies to improve the attendance rates of disadvantaged pupils and of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils' attendance is tracked weekly. Leaders organise home visits to support parents in improving pupils' attendance. Pupils who are anxious about school are supported in 'the base'. Leaders use pupil premium funding to provide incentives for attendance, such as a trip to Paris. These actions have not yet reduced the persistent absence rates of disadvantaged pupils or of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Most pupils make very strong progress in mathematics. From their different starting points, pupils' outcomes in mathematics at key stage 4 and key stage 5 are significantly above national expectations.
- Across the school, most pupils make good progress between joining the school in Year

9 and completing key stage 4. This is because pupils are guided onto the right courses at GCSE and because most teaching meets their needs.

- Since the school was previously inspected, leaders have taken effective action to increase the progress made by the most able pupils. These pupils now make good progress.
- In 2015 and 2016, pupils receiving support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities did less well than pupils nationally with similar starting points in a range of subjects. Leaders have taken effective action to ensure that the needs of these pupils are met. The curriculum, the teaching and the extra support these pupils received improved their progress in 2017 in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. However, this is not yet the case in science, or for some of the pupils who joined the school who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Leaders have made effective use of pupil premium funding to secure clear improvements in the progress disadvantaged pupils make in some subjects. Learning mentors and targeted support in lessons help them to succeed. In English and mathematics, disadvantaged pupils currently in the school make progress in line with other pupils nationally. In science, disadvantaged pupils still do not make as much progress as other pupils nationally.
- When teaching is less effective, pupils do not make the same good progress they do elsewhere in the school. This does not characterise most teaching and learning.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders are aware of the difference in the performance of students in different subjects. Actions to secure improvements are timely and effective. For example, after a dip in outcomes in A-level mathematics in 2016, leaders identified that students' skills in algebra were not good enough. They introduced a two-week focus on algebra and results improved in 2017.
- The progress students make in the sixth form is strong. In most subjects, students make progress which is at least in line with national averages.
- The strengths of teaching across the school continue in the sixth form. Strong subject knowledge and effective questioning are evident across a range of subjects. As a consequence, students develop the higher-level skills and understanding required for post-16 study.
- Leaders provide sixth-form students with a range of opportunities to develop leadership skills. Sixth-form students mentor younger pupils. They are involved in the World Challenge expedition and they volunteer to complete charity work. There is a wide-ranging extra-curricular programme. Sixth-form students are expected to help with this. They see this as a positive opportunity and willingly lend their support. Sixth-form students are well prepared for life after school.
- Relationships between sixth-form students and younger pupils are positive. They are enhanced by the time pupils spend together during vertical tutoring time. Sixth-form students have a positive work ethic and are good role models for younger pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	137462
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10031617

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	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1175
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	300
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Paul Denvir
Headteacher	Steven Palmer
Telephone number	01525 219 300
Website	www.cedarsupper.org.uk/
Email address	info@cedarsupper.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about examination and assessment results or its curriculum on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about examination and assessment results or its curriculum.
- Cedars Upper School is a secondary school serving the area of Leighton Buzzard. It is larger than the average secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.

- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils whose first language is not believed to be English is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive support for special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The school does not have any pupils at alternative provision.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum requirements for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 64 lessons, sometimes accompanied by the school's senior leaders, to observe pupils' learning and progress. They also reviewed the work of a range of pupils in their books.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders and three members of the governing body.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in groups and individually across different age groups.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation summary and improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings and spending plans. They also looked at the school's behaviour and attendance records and its pupil progress tracking information.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's single central record of recruitment checks for staff.
- Inspectors considered 221 responses to Parent View and 85 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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Daniel Gee	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Ofsted Inspector
David Turner	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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