

Saxon Mount School

Edinburgh Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN38 8HH

Inspection dates

1–2 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the school opened as an academy in 2014, the Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust has rapidly improved all aspects of the school.
- The executive headteacher, ably supported by the head of school, has ensured that all staff share high expectations of what pupils can achieve in all aspects of their education.
- Leaders have carefully planned and developed an engaging curriculum that meets the specific educational needs of pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour, both inside and outside of the school, is exemplary. Pupils display an enjoyment of learning and focus on doing their best.
- Leaders ensure that there are ample opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. As a result, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils make sound progress across the curriculum. They make rapid progress in art, their social communication and behaviour management skills.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar and sometimes stronger progress than other pupils. This is because learning leaders swiftly identify when pupils are at risk of falling behind, and act accordingly.
- All staff promote the well-being, health and safety of pupils. Pupils are very well cared for and safeguarding arrangements are highly effective.
- Trustees are uncompromising in their determination to ensure the very best education for pupils. They provide rigorous support and challenge to leaders and play a pivotal role in driving the school forward.
- Impartial careers guidance and well-planned work-experience placements ensure that pupils are ready for the next stage of their education.
- Despite their range of needs, pupils attend school regularly and absence rates are well below those seen in special schools nationally.
- The quality of teaching across the curriculum is strong and continues to improve. However, in some subjects teachers do not consistently challenge all pupils sufficiently.
- Highly trained staff provide effective support for pupils in all aspects of their learning. Conversely, the deployment of teaching assistants is not always as effective as it could be.
- Leaders' well-intended plans to extend provision post-16 are in their infancy.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by:
 - sharing best practice effectively so that the quality of teaching consistently matches the examples of excellence already evident within the school
 - building on the actions already planned to improve the effectiveness of teaching assistants in supporting pupils' learning
 - ensuring that all teachers consistently challenge pupils in their learning so that they make the progress that they are capable of across all aspects of the curriculum.
- Explore and secure ways to extend provision for learners beyond the age of 16, and ensure that leaders consider how they will maintain the strength of current provision alongside this expansion.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The executive headteacher and head of school lead with warmth, compassion and a relentless ambition for all pupils and staff. Their unwavering pursuit of the highest standard of education and welfare for all pupils has led to marked improvements across the school since it became an academy.
- The strategic influence of the multi-academy trust has had a significant and improved influence on the culture of high aspirations at the school. The senior leadership team works very effectively together to deliver consistently high expectations for all pupils. Consequently, pupils make strong progress, particularly in their communication skills and in managing their own behaviour.
- Parents are extremely positive about the school. All parents spoken to, along with those that expressed their views on the Ofsted survey, Parent View, would wholeheartedly recommend the school to another parent. One parent stated that: 'Saxon Mount is an absolutely wonderful school. I strongly believe it provides the best possible support, encouragement and opportunities for my child.'
- Pupils benefit from a carefully developed curriculum that meets all aspects of their educational needs. Leaders evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum regularly to ensure that it is always best suited to the needs and interests of the pupils currently in the school. As a result, pupils enjoy their work in lessons and make strong progress academically, socially and emotionally.
- Procedures for monitoring and improving staff performance are thorough and link seamlessly with whole-school priorities and improving pupils' outcomes. Staff are held to account effectively for the difference that their work is making to pupils' futures. Consequently, the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes continue to improve.
- Professional development for all staff is a strong feature of the school. Staff feel valued and that leaders invest in their careers. High-quality training and support helps staff to expand their skills and knowledge, and develops leadership capacity within the staff team.
- Leaders use the pupil premium well. In addition to targeted reading groups and the introduction of pupil mentors, leaders ensure that disadvantaged pupils benefit from attending extra-curricular activities, such as clubs and summer school. As a result, all pupils receive the support that they need in order to flourish.
- Learning leaders closely track pupils' progress in all aspects of their learning. This enables them to identify pupils at risk of falling behind. Leaders put appropriate strategies in place to support these pupils and, as a result, pupils catch up quickly.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a key priority for leaders. Pupils show respect and tolerance for each other, especially through the range of opportunities that they have to experience different faiths and cultures. For example, pupils recently engaged in a Diwali workshop and raised money from a sponsored walk for the Pestalozzi charity. This prepares them exceptionally well for life in modern Britain.

- Pupils enjoy opportunities for extra-curricular trips and activities. The school makes effective use of the facilities it has on site and those in the surrounding areas. As a result, pupils' engagement in these activities is high.
- Leaders strive to improve how the school prepares pupils for the next stage in their education, employment or training. Impartial careers guidance and individualised work-experience placements support this aim. To this end, leaders plan to extend provision for pupils beyond the age of 16. Although the rationale for this is sound, it is only in the early stages of development.

Governance of the school

- The multi-academy trust and the academy advisory board are committed to the school and its pupils. They provide rigorous challenge and support to leaders and demonstrate a clear understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement.
- Trustees know their responsibilities and avidly believe that pupils at the school deserve the very best. They undertake a range of training to ensure that they are suitably knowledgeable and able to evaluate the information they receive from leaders.
- Trustees ably fulfil their safeguarding duties, for example by regularly conducting safeguarding visits and making sure that they are up to date with recent guidance and legislation. This contributes to the highly effective safeguarding culture that is apparent across the school.
- Governors have a clear oversight of the impact that the pupil premium and catch-up funding have had on pupils' outcomes, and monitor the use of this funding effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils' welfare is a priority for all staff and is at the core of everything that they do. As a result, pupils feel safe and are safe.
- Leaders ensure that staff receive comprehensive training on all aspects of safeguarding practice. This enables staff to carry out their responsibilities to keep children safe and protect them from harm.
- Pupils' online safety is a priority for leaders. Appropriate filters are in place in order to protect pupils from potential harm. The curriculum ensures that pupils know how to protect themselves online so that they are able to stay safe when using technology beyond the school gates.
- Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. The designated safeguarding lead is confident in challenging and following up any matters with other agencies to ensure that pupils and their families are receiving the right support in a timely manner.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Where teaching is highly effective, pupils engage fully and make rapid progress in their learning. Teachers precisely plan activities that match pupils' individual needs and this allows pupils to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects.
- Teachers question pupils skilfully, probing their thinking and consolidating their learning. They also routinely check pupils' understanding of tasks to ensure that they identify errors or misconceptions promptly.
- Staff promote learning in the school through the positive relationships they have with pupils. Pupils work well with each other and with other adults that support them. Pupils are increasingly independent in lessons and use self-help skills to support their learning.
- Parents are positive about the progress that their children make at the school and the information that they receive from teachers. One parent stated that: 'The staff are exemplary at explaining my child's progress and his areas for development. They communicate this to him and us in a positive way.'
- Teachers regularly set homework that builds on pupils' prior learning. Pupils say that homework is helpful to them and that they appreciate the feedback that they receive from teachers. Most parents who responded to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, agreed that the homework the school sets is appropriate.
- Highly effective teaching in art ensures that pupils achieve well in this subject. The many opportunities that pupils have to study the work of individual artists cultivates their curiosity and develops their creative thinking.
- The teaching of English is effective. Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that high-quality reading sessions encourage pupils' love of reading. There are further opportunities for reading across the curriculum, which helps to increase pupils' fluency.
- The teaching of mathematics is also effective. The mathematics curriculum covers a wide range of content and provides pupils with the opportunity to master key numerical skills. Feedback provided to pupils in this area is highly effective and enables them to make swift progress.
- Well-trained teaching assistants provide a good level of support to pupils. The most effective teaching assistants enable pupils' independence and skilfully question them to deepen their learning. However, sometimes teachers do not give enough consideration as to how best to use teaching assistants. As a result, the support they provide to facilitate learning is not as effective as it could be.
- While teaching is consistently good across the school, it does not always match the high quality seen elsewhere within the school. Leaders recognise this and are using training and peer support effectively to strengthen practice across the school.
- Teachers do not consistently provide all pupils with sufficiently challenging work. For example, pupils who are capable of making faster progress in their learning have limited opportunities to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills in mathematics. This slows their progress and prevents them from being able to reach the standards they are sometimes capable of attaining.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. This is because staff have an in-depth knowledge of pupils' needs and are able to provide highly individualised support as a result.
- The extremely positive relationships between pupils and staff reinforce the culture and ethos of the school. Staff intervene effectively when pupils' behaviour is challenging, and support them well to develop their social and emotional skills.
- Staff work very effectively with a number of external professionals to ensure that pupils and their families receive the assistance they need, both inside and outside of school. This helps pupils to become successful learners.
- Leaders manage pupils' transition into the school and prepare them to move onto further education at the end of Year 11 extremely well. Staff work closely with colleagues from local primary schools and sixth-form colleges to share important information about pupils. This increases the likelihood of these transitions being successful.
- Parents commented on how well the school values its pupils and their families. Such views as: 'Saxon Mount is a very positive school and values the pupils and parents. It is well led by an experienced senior leadership team who genuinely care about their pupils' illustrate parents' opinions.
- Pupils refer to the words respect and tolerance regularly, when discussing differences between individuals. Displays around the school communicate and reinforce positive attitudes towards others and the acceptance of difference is embedded in all that the school does.
- Pupils have many opportunities to work both collaboratively and independently at school. They do this well and show respect for others and their learning. This increases their self-confidence and communication skills.
- Pupils state that they feel safe in the school. While they acknowledge that sometimes bullying does occur, they are confident that adults act promptly to resolve any issues. All pupils spoken to by inspectors knew who to go to in the school should they have any worries or concerns.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Almost without exception, in classes and around the school, pupils display exemplary conduct. They are well mannered, respectful and considerate to each other, staff and visitors.
- Well-established routines support pupils' behaviour and emotional well-being in lessons. The school's traffic-light system, which describes what pupils' behaviour looks like when they are behaving well, or not so well, in class provides pupils with clear guidance. As a result, classrooms are calm and learning is purposeful.

- Many pupils arrive at the school with difficulties in managing their own behaviour. Staff work together with families and external agencies to effectively support pupils to develop skills in order to self-regulate their responses to situations. As a result, there is a notable improvement in pupils' behaviour over time and the school has not had any fixed-term exclusions over the past two years.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are highly positive. Pupils told inspectors that they 'enjoy' learning and would like the school to be open for longer so that they can 'learn more'.
- All groups of pupils attend school regularly, with absence rates well below the national average for special schools. This is because leaders take swift and effective action when the attendance of an individual becomes a concern.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school with attainment below that typical for their age. The effective use of assessment means that staff quickly gain a clear picture of where pupils' strengths and weaknesses lie. They use this information to plan a curriculum that meets pupils' varied and individual needs.
- Since the school became an academy, the attainment of pupils has improved. This reflects the higher expectations that leaders have for pupils' learning, as opposed to just their welfare. Pupils increasingly achieve qualifications that help them secure placements in local mainstream colleges. Consequently, all pupils leave the school with at least one qualification of a high quality. This enables them to make ambitious choices at post-16.
- Pupils make substantial gains in their reading despite their level of need. This is because of the highly effective strategies that are in place to develop their reading skills. As a result, pupils make excellent progress in reading across the school.
- Progress in English and mathematics for all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, is strong. Leaders accurately track pupils' progress, and learning leaders take rapid action to tackle any underachievement.
- Pupils make excellent progress in their social communication skills. Pupils share their views and opinions regularly with staff and other pupils. This helps them to practise and embed these skills successfully.
- Pupils' work in art demonstrates the rapid progress that they make in this subject. Workbooks show experimentation with different media, and strong development of skills. Displays of artwork demonstrate high achievement across year groups.
- The school's assessment data indicates that current pupils are making sound progress and a very high proportion are exceeding the expected standards in a number of subjects. However, scrutiny of pupils' work and visits to lessons indicate a more varied picture. In some classes, tasks are insufficiently demanding to enable all pupils to build on their prior learning.

School details

Unique reference number	141475
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10036812

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	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	127
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jenny Smith
Executive Headteacher	Executive Headteacher – Richard Preece Head of School – Amanda Jagot
Telephone number	01424 426 303
Website	www.torfield-saxonmount.com
Email address	saxonoffice@tasmata.org.uk
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.
- In 2012, the school federated with Torfield Primary Special School. In 2014, both schools became part of the Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust. The headteacher of Saxon Mount became the executive headteacher of both schools. He is also the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust.
- The school is registered for 125 pupils aged between 11 and 16. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The majority of pupils have needs associated with autistic spectrum disorder. Many have additional difficulties relating to communication, social and mental health. A few have

visual and physical needs. The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is higher than in other schools nationally.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- Almost three quarters of the pupils are male. A large number of pupils enter and leave the school at times other than the beginning of the school year.
- The head of school was appointed to the school in September 2017.
- The school is accountable to a governing body composed of trustees, and an academy advisory board that supports their work.
- The school has established a partnership with the University of Brighton to provide for specialist postgraduate teacher training.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made visits to observe learning in 19 lessons. The majority of these visits were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- When visiting classrooms, inspectors observed aspects of the lessons that were taking place, but focused particularly on gathering evidence about what teaching and learning are typically like over time. This included scrutinising the work in pupils' books and on display, talking with pupils about their learning and hearing them read.
- Inspectors took the school's assessments of pupils' progress into account and considered leaders' and external visitors' evaluations about the quality of teaching over time.
- Inspectors met formally and informally with a wide range of people to gather further evidence. This included pupils, parents, staff, school leaders, advisory board members and trustees.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of the school's documentation and records, including particular scrutiny of those relating to safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of responses to the Ofsted online surveys of pupils' and staff's views. There were nine responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, which included nine written comments. Views from parents, staff and pupils were also gathered informally and formally throughout the inspection and considered alongside this evidence.

Inspection team

Emma Sanderson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jon Whitcombe

Ofsted Inspector

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