

Weatherfield Academy

Brewers Hill Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 1AF

Inspection dates

21–22 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
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 and governors are honest about what their school does well. Their objectivity has helped to secure significant improvements since the previous inspection.
- The headteacher's links with businesses and the local community have greatly improved the school's curriculum, facilities and resources.
- Pupils' personal development is outstanding. As one parent said, 'It's an amazing, inspiring place to be that encourages children to maximise their potential for future adult life.'
- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils behave impeccably and inspectors saw no low-level disruption throughout the inspection.
- Teachers plan lessons well. They have high expectations of what pupils can do, and choose exciting activities that pupils find interesting.
- Pupils achieve a range of useful qualifications, including English and mathematics. They make good progress from their starting points.
- Governors are astute. They oversee the school's strategic development well. Their wide range of skills enables them to provide valuable support and effective challenge.
- Leaders' vision for everyone to 'become the best person you can be' is being realised.
- Staff celebrate pupils' differences. This is an inclusive school. Pupils are kind to one another, and accept that they are all different.
- Most pupils move from Year 11 into the school's sixth form. Good leadership of the sixth form ensures that students gain useful qualifications alongside valuable life skills.
- Leaders help all staff to develop. Many are promoted within school, solving recruitment problems and driving standards higher.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend well. They feel safe and, as one said, 'It's like a second home.'
- Most parents are very positive about the work of the school. A few parents feel that their child's needs are not fully met. Leaders are aware of this and provide staff with additional training.
- In some subjects, pupils do not make the progress they could because a few teachers plan work that is either too easy or too hard.
- While leaders track how pupils are doing, their current systems do not allow them to easily show the good progress that pupils make.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - making sure that leaders can demonstrate quickly and efficiently the good progress that pupils make
 - ensuring that, as pupils' requirements change, staff receive additional training so that they can support all pupils effectively, including those who have specific needs.
- Make teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' outcomes outstanding, by:
 - matching all teaching to the needs of individual pupils so that more pupils make rapid and sustained progress from their different starting points across the curriculum.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders have acted on the recommendations from the last inspection and have secured significant improvements. Clear, coherent leadership from the headteacher has created a in which where all staff continually assess and evaluate what they do. Staff focus on what is important for the pupils, and do these things well.
- Expectations are very high. Leaders are relentless, but also supportive, in helping everyone to meet those expectations. Inspectors noted the excellent standards of social behaviour. The respect that pupils show for each other and for staff is exceptional. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is shaped by the school's caring, nurturing and supportive ethos.
- Leaders and governors know their school extremely well. They are astute, objective and realistic about the school's strengths and what needs improving. They share the same vision that everyone will 'become the best person you can be.' They are well on the way to achieving this goal because of their clear and strategic plans for the future development of the school.
- The headteacher has been highly proactive in establishing links with the wider community. Through this, he has secured additional support and a long-term commitment from businesses to work with the school. Pupils benefit from the school's fantastic facilities and vastly improved resources on a daily basis.
- Leaders manage teaching, learning and assessment well because staff are clear about what is required of them. Staff know that clear lesson objectives to meet all pupils' needs, and the '4 Ps' (planning, participation, pace and progress) are the school's non-negotiables. Leaders' frequent visits to classrooms and scrutiny of pupils' books give them a clear overview of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. Leaders use performance management increasingly well to drive standards higher.
- Pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans are meticulously maintained. The school has a highly innovative and efficient way of collating pupils' information and progress. Staff track closely pupils' social and academic development. Parents and carers receive regular updates to let them know how their children are doing.
- Leaders are innovative in solving their recruitment challenges. They have the highest aspirations for everyone, and use training to develop staff well. A key focus has been the role of teaching assistants, who receive specific guidance. These staff are now more effective in supporting learning and improving pupils' outcomes. Other staff who joined as apprentices are now fully qualified teachers. When asked how they had coped with the change in role, one replied, 'I love it. It is my calling.'
- Leaders survey the views of parents and pupils to inform further improvement. Parental responses indicate that the vast majority strongly agree that the school is well led and managed. Parents appreciate what the school does for their children, and, as one parent said, 'I cannot praise the school enough.'
- Staff demonstrate empathy, sensitivity and patience to help young people who have highly complex needs develop a more confident and positive outlook on life. The school's motto is more than a strapline. It underpins its work, while at the same time

epitomising fundamental British values. As one pupil said, 'Since coming here, I have made more progress. I attend more regularly, and I behave better.'

- Leaders have established a suitable curriculum that focuses on developing pupils' core skills in English and mathematics. Alongside this, they provide a wide range of other subjects that allow pupils to develop practical skills and gain accredited qualifications. Working on the farm has a positive impact on pupils' attitudes towards learning, and develops useful numeracy and teamwork skills.
- Individual guidance helps plan pupils' next steps in their educational journeys. All pupils progress into employment, education or training. This further endorses leaders' judicious use of additional funding to raise standards for all learners, including disadvantaged pupils.
- Staff support pupils on work placements at the shop, garden or café at a local college. All pupils have wider opportunities to participate in sport, music, art and gardening to enrich their experiences. These help to develop pupils' confidence, communication skills and understanding of how to travel safely. Staff help pupils to develop the skills they need so they are able to manage their own lives more independently.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities, for example playing cricket at Lords, collecting awards at the cup final, or regular lunchtime activities including football, fitness, gardening, computing or dance. Pupils enjoy the challenge of collecting reward points, and spoke positively about the forthcoming trip to the cinema to watch 'Wonder woman'. The residential trips, including the Blue Peris Mountain Centre, expand pupils' horizons and provide great memories.
- The responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff were universally positive. Every member of staff is proud to work at this school. Many staff members were working at the school at the time of the previous inspection; all consider that the school has improved. Staff feel that they are well supported and well led.
- The profile of pupils joining the school has changed. Leaders ensure that staff receive specific training on autism and mental health issues to help them meet pupils' needs. Leaders are aware that staff require ongoing training to give them the specific skills to support pupils who have an increasing range of complex needs.
- Leaders' monitoring systems highlight the progress that pupils make. However, they are very time intensive, and leaders know that a more efficient system would help them to demonstrate pupils' academic progress more readily.

Governance

- Governors ensure that leaders spend additional funding well. Year 7 catch-up funding is used to fund a phonics programme and numeracy resources that improve pupils' reading, writing and mathematical skills. The sport premium is helping pupils become more active; the four trained physical education specialists encouraged every pupil to represent the school in at least one activity last year. Funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is helping them to accelerate their progress.
- Governors are proud of the school's caring and nurturing environment and its many achievements. Governors are challenging and supportive to the headteacher in equal

measure.

- Governors have an open and honest relationship with the headteacher that enables them to gain an accurate view of the school's strengths. They question leaders to assure themselves of the effectiveness of the school. When unsure, they ask for more details, including facts and figures to demonstrate the impact of leaders' actions. They share the headteacher's ambition and vision for the school to become outstanding.
- Governors oversee arrangements to manage the performance of teachers and ensure that only those eligible for rewards move up the pay scale.
- Governors ensure that the school meets its statutory safeguarding responsibilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that all checks are carried out when appointing new staff or allowing volunteers to work with children.
- Statutory policies and procedures to protect pupils are up to date and shared with parents on the school's website. Staff responsible for child protection maintain detailed notes of any incidents or issues relating to safeguarding. Links with outside agencies, particularly the local authority safeguarding team, are well established.
- Owing to pupils' highly complex needs, leaders pay close attention to ensure that pupils are safe while in school and when on visits. The school site is safe and secure. Risk assessments, including some for individual pupils, are prepared when off-site visits are made. These help keep pupils safe.
- Procedures to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism are firmly established. All staff training on safeguarding is up to date.
- Pupils' use of computers and social media is carefully monitored to ensure their safety. Pupils know how to stay safe online. Pupils feel safe. As one said, 'It is a safe environment. It is like a second home.'

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders are clear about their expectations. They want to see the school's '4 Ps' in every lesson. Pupils make most progress where teachers use these effectively and consistently.
- The majority of teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They set work accordingly. Pupils respond to the challenge, and their work is meticulous. Inspectors noted this in English, mathematics and design and technology, and pupils' work clearly demonstrates the good progress they make over time in these subjects.
- Where learning is most effective, teachers use pupil information and starting points to plan lessons carefully. They meet with the teaching assistants to discuss each pupil's progress and match activities in lessons to what pupils need. Inspectors saw good use of this in English, where all pupils made progress with their sentence structures.
- Teachers use visual or practical activities effectively to capture pupils' interest. For

example, inspectors saw pupils describing the position of cakes on a shelf in mathematics, and practising intonation in English with a friend. Both activities helped pupils to develop their knowledge, focus harder and make good progress.

- Staff build strong, supportive and productive relationships with pupils. This is a real strength of the school. The calm, caring and sensitive approach used by staff helps pupils to engage well in lessons and to learn more effectively. As one pupil said, 'Staff here are very understanding of our needs.'
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide useful support to help pupils learn. Most staff use questioning well to provide additional challenge and to gauge whether pupils fully understand. If they do not, they guide them to the correct answers, rather than just giving them solutions. This helps pupils to develop the skills that they need to become successful independent learners.
- Teachers assess pupils continually and identify any gaps in their learning. When pupils need extra help, staff provide additional support. For example, pupils get help with phonics, handwriting, reading and mathematics so they can catch up and make good progress.
- Pupils benefit greatly from the one-to-one support and small classes. The individual help given to some pupils who have complex needs is highly effective. Staff use praise well to motivate pupils.
- Most staff correct any misconceptions that pupils have and make sure that they are secure in their understanding, before moving on. However, in some cases, pupils move on to more difficult work without having a secure understanding of the previous topic.
- A few teachers do not match activities well to pupils' needs, and their expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. The work in these pupils' books reflects that they do not make the progress they could.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders have worked tirelessly to establish a provision where pupils feel they can succeed. The 'Hobbit Houses' help provide quiet spaces for pupils or small groups so they have time to reflect. Dobby the school dog is used well for counselling, developing pupils' reading skills, and as a reward. All staff strive to be the best they can be because the 'children are the centre of everything that we do'.
- Pupils are extremely happy and well cared for in school. They have flourished in the welcoming, inclusive and nurturing environment that leaders have created. Pupils feel safe, and, as a result, they grow in self-esteem. As one pupil said, 'I have become more talkative, and more confident. It's like a second home.' The vast majority of parents agree. As one said, 'My daughter has attended Weatherfield Academy for 10 years and still loves every minute. She cannot wait to go to school every day and misses it in the holidays.'
- Pupils are kind to each other. They respect each other's differences. They do not use

pupils' different faiths, backgrounds or disabilities as reasons for being unkind. They told inspectors that 'Staff accept everyone's differences. They celebrate this and if you have different opinions, they don't say that one of you is wrong, but that you're both right.'

- Staff are passionate about helping pupils develop the skills necessary to live independently. The curriculum meets its aims to prepare pupils for life after Weatherfield. Pupils are given additional responsibilities to develop their independence. For example, pupils are assigned to look after every area in the academy, including flowerbeds, vegetable patches and herb gardens.
- 'The Farm' is a wonderful provision that gives pupils valuable experiences that help them to develop their social, emotional and resilience skills. Pupils use their time in design and technology well to build, improve and repair outbuildings. In rural studies, pupils learn how to care for a range of different animals, including chickens, goats, alpacas, sheep, ducks, geese, guinea pigs and rabbits.
- 'The Base' unit caters for a small proportion of pupils who are experiencing particular difficulties and are struggling to cope in lessons. Pupils receive exceptional one-to-one care and support, including access to a trained counsellor, to help them re-engage in learning. Pupils are expertly supported and only return to 'touch base' to let staff know how they are progressing.
- Pupils are shown the value of healthy eating habits through choices at mealtimes, buying fresh food to be cooked by pupils, and growing crops and vegetables in the school farm.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities that add significantly to their personal development and welfare. Duke of Edinburgh Awards, trips to theme parks and the cinema, the summer fair and the Christmas pantomime develop their social skills while adding to the family feel of the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They are polite, open doors for visitors and move from one lesson to another quickly and cheerfully. Inspectors noted their positive behaviour throughout the inspection.
- Staff expect pupils to behave well. Pupils respond positively and their behaviour is exemplary. Inspectors saw no low-level disruption in any lessons throughout the inspection.
- Leaders have established an environment where pupils are able to learn. Pupils appreciate and respect the resources they have. They look after school, and the site is virtually free of litter. Displays that highlight pupils' work are colourful, neat and well maintained.
- Pupils treat each other as they would hope to be treated. Inspectors saw pupils patting their friends on the back and saying, 'Well done' after they had stood up and taken part in the assembly role-play. In the dance activity at lunchtime, pupils support others with higher levels of disability so that they too can take part.

- Leaders monitor pupils' attendance closely. Current attendance is in excess of 92%. When considering the exceptionally low attendance of some pupils prior to joining the school, this is a remarkable achievement. It shows that leaders' actions to raise attendance have been extremely effective. Pupils' attendance is significantly higher than the national figure for other special schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils have an EHC plan. Many arrive with a history of disrupted education and gaps in their knowledge. Senior leaders recognise that prior assessment information does not always provide a fully accurate picture. Staff assess pupils quickly on entry to establish what they know and what they can do.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school, and the positive learning environment means they enjoy studying and learn successfully. Inspectors noted that, in the vast majority of cases, the longer pupils attend the school, the better progress they make. Parents mainly agree. As one said, 'The school is positive about what my son can achieve and view him as a person full of potential rather than limited by disability.'
- Leaders' focus on helping pupils to read is paying dividends. Pupils' reading ages show impressive gains. The effectively managed phonics systems, trained reading mentors, pupils' reading journals and specific curriculum time have raised the profile of reading. The well-resourced library is well led and managed. It has been built up from virtually nothing, and now provides a welcoming, calm space where pupils enjoy reading.
- Pupils' rates of progress have to be seen fully in the context of their individual needs. Inspectors looked at how the school cross-references pupils' targets in their EHC plans. Inspection evidence shows that the vast majority of pupils show good levels of improvement from their various starting points.
- Pupils receive independent and relevant careers advice. All pupils progress to either employment, education or training and have done so for a number of years. Staff ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- The curriculum enables pupils to gain basic skills in literacy and numeracy, alongside essential life skills for independent living. Leaders ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to learn and practise these life skills.
- In 2017, all pupils achieved qualifications in English and mathematics. Pupils averaged seven passes in a range of nationally recognised qualifications. Pupils also followed courses to develop life, social and employability skills. Some pupils also achieved functional skills awards in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Leaders use funding well so that key stage 3 pupils catch up and improve their basic skills. Funding has been used to provide new resources and training for staff to teach phonics more effectively and purchase new equipment to aid learning in numeracy. Some pupils' reading ages have risen steeply.
- Inspection evidence shows that in most lessons, pupils make good progress from their various starting points. This is due to the good teaching and the high level of care and support they receive. However, some pupils achieve less well than they could. Leaders acknowledge that, in some subjects, teachers need to plan work more effectively to

meet these pupils' needs.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Good leadership of the sixth form has ensured that students follow an appropriate curriculum that meets their needs well. All students gain essential literacy and numeracy skills appropriate to their own particular needs. Alongside this, students gain a wide range of additional qualifications in science, ICT, child development, physical education and hair and beauty. These provide valuable practical and life skills that equip students well for when they leave school.
- Students enjoy life in the sixth form and make good progress. They are happy, feel safe, and all stay and finish their courses. As in the main school, students feel that teachers support them well. As a result, they attend well, work hard and gain a range of nationally accredited qualifications.
- The sixth form provides a safe, familiar environment for students to continue to develop their personal and life skills. Pupils and parents appreciate the provision, and almost all pupils in Year 11 progress to the sixth form.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers have high expectations and plan exciting lessons that meet the different needs of pupils well. For example, in English pupils are encouraged to read more, work in groups well and complete extended writing tasks to convey their thoughts meaningfully. In hair and beauty, pupils work well in pairs to develop valuable practical skills linked to their particular interests.
- Careers advice and students' transition when they leave Weatherfield are managed carefully and successfully. All students undertake a supported placement at a local college where they assist in either the shop, café or garden area. This helps pupils to become more familiar with new people and the college. Students progress to a wide range of courses, including pathway courses, gateway qualifications and supported internships. It works; all students remained in sustained destinations last year.
- Leaders have improved the curriculum further this year. All students now complete Duke of Edinburgh Awards that educate them in healthy living, road safety and employability skills. Leaders continue to assess the appropriateness of qualifications.
- Many students also complete work placements that give them useful experience linked to their future career aspirations. Leaders are aware of the need to develop this further so that all students have similar opportunities.

School details

Unique reference number	137896
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10036253

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	115
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqueline Hunt
Headteacher	Joe Selmes
Telephone number	01582 605632
Website	www.weatherfield.beds.sch.uk
Email address	selmesj@weatherfield.cbeds.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 September 2013

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.
- Weatherfield Academy was established on 1 March 2012. It provides education for pupils, aged between seven and 19 years, who have a wide range of needs, including severe learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health issues, and autistic spectrum conditions.

- All pupils who attend the academy have EHC plans.
- The majority of the pupils are of White British heritage.
- The academy does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out observations, all of which were joint observations with senior leaders, across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects. They also visited a pastoral group session, viewed the farm provision and watched two assemblies.
- Inspectors looked carefully at pupils' work, heard pupils read, and talked to groups of pupils from different year groups to discuss their experiences of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, newly qualified teachers, trainees and governors.
- An inspector held telephone conversations with staff members from the children's services department at the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation including safeguarding records, case studies, attendance records, self-evaluation summaries, the school's improvement plan and current assessment information.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 31 members of staff who completed the questionnaire. They also considered the responses, including free-text, from 35 parents via Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

John Randall, lead inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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