

# The Commonweal School

The Mall, Old Town, Swindon, Wiltshire SN1 4JE

## Inspection dates

28–29 November 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The new headteacher has refocused senior leaders on the quality of teaching. He has raised teachers' expectations but retained the inclusive ethos of the school.
- Senior leaders' roles have been reorganised so their responsibilities closely link to the school's development priorities. This is leading to improvement in teaching, learning and assessment.
- The progress of pupils currently in Years 7 to 11 is significantly better than the progress of pupils who left the school last year. Current pupils are making good progress in GCSE English and mathematics.
- Pupils' progress in GCSE French, history and geography has been consistently strong over the last three years.
- Teaching is generally well planned and so is helping pupils to gain knowledge and understanding quicker than in the past. Teachers do not have enough opportunities, however, to share ideas and this limits the pace of improvement.
- Teachers know the pupils well and in the majority of subjects they provide activities which are appropriately challenging. However, this is not consistent in science and so pupils, particularly the most able, make less progress in this subject.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are supported well. The two specialist centres in the school are well led. They enable pupils who have physical disabilities and pupils who have specific learning difficulties to make good progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils who left the school in 2017 did not make enough progress. Pupils currently in the school, and especially in key stage 3, are making better progress. Senior leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to improve the progress of this group.
- Pupils' attitudes are characterised by care, tolerance and respect. Pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school is good. They accept each other readily, and this contributes to the highly inclusive atmosphere.
- Attendance is in line with the average, but, a small proportion of pupils still find it difficult to attend school regularly.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has successfully established a new sixth form, known as 'C6'. Students are very complimentary about their experience of sixth-form life.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievements by:
  - ensuring that teachers have more opportunities to discuss and share good teaching strategies
  - increasing the level of challenge in science, particularly for the most able
  - providing further targeted help for disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by reducing the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Since taking up his post full-time in September 2017, the new headteacher has made improving the quality of teaching his first priority. He has an ambitious vision for the school, to raise pupils' achievement while maintaining the spirit of inclusion which already runs throughout the school.
- Senior leaders share the headteacher's vision. The senior leadership team has recently been reorganised as new leaders have joined. Senior leaders understand their responsibilities well and they are taking effective action to improve practice at the school.
- The school has effective methods for monitoring its effectiveness and setting an agenda for raising the quality of education it provides for pupils. Any weak teaching or slippage in pupils' progress is identified and tackled head on. For example, the reasons for the dip in pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics last year have been thoroughly investigated and addressed.
- Middle leaders form an enthusiastic and able team. Some of them are new to their roles and so have not had time to make improvements in their areas of responsibility. As a result, improvements in teaching are not as embedded in some subjects.
- The coordinator for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has a comprehensive understanding of her role and the pupils in her care. She leads the two specialist provisions in the school very effectively. The additional funding for these pupils is used appropriately to meet their needs. Consequently, pupils who are supported through these provisions are fully integrated into the school and thriving.
- Senior and middle leaders monitor the quality of teaching closely and, through an effective performance management process, identify specific development targets for staff. This is leading to weaker practice being challenged and pupils' progress rising. Senior leaders have plans in place to expand the extent of teachers' collaboration and sharing of ideas so that improvements in teaching take place more rapidly.
- Teachers are well motivated because they recognise the example of moral purpose being set by the headteacher. Those new to the school and new to the profession are exceptionally positive about the support they receive.
- Senior leaders have a clear rationale for the design of the curriculum. In key stage 4, pupils take mainly academic GCSE qualifications; however, a small number of vocational courses have been retained. The curriculum is being developed in key stage 3, so that there is a clear progression of ideas from primary school through to GCSE qualifications. Senior leaders ensure that transitions between key stages are managed well.
- The school prepares pupils for life in modern Britain very well. The 'Commonweal Way' enshrines the principles of tolerance and respect that senior leaders expect all pupils to adhere to.
- Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, including sporting, artistic and cultural activities. Pupils particularly enjoyed a production of 'An Evening of

Broadway' last year. Senior leaders monitor pupils' take up rate of these activities.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, spiritual and cultural development is particularly strong. Pupils mix with others from widely differing social and cultural backgrounds on a day-to-day basis because the school is highly inclusive. Incidents of intolerance or racism are few and far between.
- Senior leaders have worked hard to research the most effective use of pupil premium funding. Despite their best efforts, disadvantaged pupils' progress was below the progress of other pupils nationally in 2017.
- Pupils who arrive in Year 7 with weak literacy and numeracy skills receive suitable support and this helps them to catch up with other pupils in the school. Senior leaders ensure that the extra funding allocated for this group is used effectively. Pupils' literacy skills are developed throughout the rest of the school because teachers ensure that they are given chances to practise their skills in all subjects.
- The school receives support through the 'Swindon challenge' organisation; however, this is at an early stage and so it is not possible to evaluate the impact of this work.
- Parents who responded to the online survey, Parent View, believe that the school is well led and managed. The great majority of parents would recommend this school to others.

### **Governance of the school**

- The governing body is a strong and settled group. The chair of governors has ensured that governors' skills are kept up to date through relevant training. As a result, governors have a good understanding of information about the progress of different groups of pupils at the school. They ensure that teachers, including the headteacher, are held to account systematically for their performance.
- All governors have a good understanding of their specific responsibilities. They ensure that their statutory duties with respect to safeguarding are carried out. They understand how extra funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is spent. They oversee the use of pupil premium funding and Year 7 catch-up funding effectively, challenging senior leaders about their effectiveness appropriately.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The headteacher leads by example in giving safeguarding a high priority. Over the last year, governors and senior leaders have strengthened the culture of vigilance at the school. New leadership of this area of the school's work has ensured that not only are safeguarding procedures and systems in place, but they are also followed rigorously by all staff. Recent examples show that where concerns are raised about the welfare of a pupil, they are followed up quickly and effectively.
- All staff receive appropriate training in safeguarding and this is followed up by regular updates from the designated safeguarding leader. The school's records show that when referrals to outside agencies are made, there is timely follow-up and action. Senior leaders work successfully with other agencies and alternative providers to ensure that pupils are safe when working off-site.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- The new headteacher and senior leaders have brought a renewed focus on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This has enabled teachers to reflect on their work and seek improvements. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are now higher and this is leading to pupils making better progress.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide expert support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Pupils from the two specialist centres within the school are integrated into lessons wherever possible. They learn confidently alongside their peers because staff work tirelessly to overcome barriers to their progress. For example, pupils with physical disabilities are included wholeheartedly in physical education lessons.
- Senior leaders have introduced a new, more formal, assessment process for pupils. This is generating better information so that middle leaders and teachers can pinpoint pupils' misconceptions and help them to improve.
- Teachers know their pupils as individuals. Where learning is strongest, teachers provide pupils, including the most able pupils, with appropriately challenging work and they make good progress as a result. In many GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics, teachers' accurate assessment of pupils' understanding is used well to plan further work. This is less consistent in some areas, for example GCSE science.
- While most teaching is well planned, there are areas where teaching is not well matched to the needs of different abilities of pupils. Some staff have not developed their ability to plan work that stretches the most able pupils, because they have not had enough opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues.
- Pupils and staff show respect for each other, resulting in the vast majority of pupils having positive attitudes to learning. Teaching proceeds unhindered by disruption, and this underpins the good progress pupils make.
- Teachers are very aware of the need to help disadvantaged pupils make better progress and they support these pupils in variety of ways. Even though the school had success in supporting a number of pupils, the progress of this group of pupils overall was below average last year. Recent improvements in teaching and well-targeted support for individuals are leading to better progress for this group, particularly in key stage 3.
- Teachers provide pupils with many opportunities to write at length and so develop their vocabulary and writing skills. As a result, pupils are becoming more confident when faced with written examinations.
- Homework is used effectively by most teachers to help pupils develop their ideas and extend their learning.
- A large majority of parents who responded to Parent View believe that pupils are well taught. Pupils who spoke to inspectors share this view. Pupils appreciate the dedication of their teachers.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

## Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils express pride in their school. They appreciate the help they are given by staff. The great majority of pupils happily accept the 'Commonweal Way' which is a statement of tolerance and respect for others.
- Newcomers to the school from other countries are readily accepted. Pupils have a strong sense of empathy towards others of a range of backgrounds or religions. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are supported well by specialist staff.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They told inspectors that there is little bullying and that staff deal with it effectively when it arises. There are few incidents of racist or homophobic bullying.
- Pupils arrive punctually to lessons and settle down to work quickly. Most pupils show an eagerness to learn, particularly when teaching engages their curiosity.
- Senior leaders ensure that pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. The programme of personal, social and health education, known as 'social science', helps pupils know how to stay safe, for example when using the internet or social media.
- The school provides careers education and guidance through a series of assemblies, lessons and other activities. Many pupils have credible career plans in mind.
- The school has placed a small number of pupils with alternative providers in order to meet their needs better. Senior leaders monitor the welfare of these pupils very closely and so ensure that they are safe and well looked after.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are considerate and well-mannered. Their conduct around school is good and they behave sensibly when groups of pupils are moving through crowded corridors.
- Behaviour in lessons is usually good. Most pupils listen well and cooperate fully with teachers and teaching assistants.
- Senior leaders are determined that all pupils stay in school to learn. The effectiveness of their systems for managing behaviour, and the success of their efforts to help pupils comply with expectations, mean that rates of pupils' exclusion are low.
- Rates of pupils' attendance in recent years have remained around the national averages. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent from school is above average. Staff have been successful in reducing the rate of persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils, but a small minority of pupils still do not attend school regularly enough.
- A large proportion of the parents who responded to the Parent View survey agree that the school makes sure pupils are well behaved.

**Outcomes for pupils**

**Good**

- In a large majority of subjects, pupils currently in the school are learning well and making good progress. In recent years, pupils' achievements in GCSE English and mathematics have been strong; however, last year, this was not the case. Senior leaders have reacted quickly to ensure that current pupils' achievements are better.
- Pupils make good progress and so attain well in GCSE modern foreign languages and humanities subjects because of the well-organised and effective teaching in these departments. Pupils' progress in GCSE science subjects is not as strong because teaching does not consistently challenge pupils, especially the most able pupils, to deepen and extend their understanding.
- Across the school, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points as a result of the expert help they receive. Pupils with physical disabilities and with specific learning difficulties are integrated into mainstream lessons very effectively. The inclusive ethos of the school contributes strongly to the academic progress they make.
- The least able pupils are supported well. Teaching supports these pupils by providing work which is well matched to their needs. In 2017, the progress of this group was in line with other pupils nationally who had similar starting points.
- Pupils in key stage 3 are confident and articulate. They are able to explain clearly what they are learning about in lessons, showing that they have a secure grasp of key concepts and ideas. A minority of pupils in Year 9 are less confident. The school's assessment information shows that their understanding is not as secure.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils' progress has been well below the progress of other pupils nationally, despite the best efforts of senior leaders. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school, and especially in key stage 3, are making better progress as a result of support that is tailored to their individual needs.
- Pupils' literacy skills are improving because most teaching ensures that a regular emphasis is placed on pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils who start Year 7 with weak literacy and numeracy skills are catching up with their peers because of the extra support the school provides for them.
- A small number of Year 10 pupils attend vocational courses at a local college. Senior leaders monitor their learning closely and ensure that these pupils attend well and make good progress.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment. A higher proportion of pupils than seen nationally go on to secure places in education employment or training when they leave the school.

### **16 to 19 study programmes**

**Good**

- The sixth form, known as 'C6', was opened in September 2014. The great majority of students are drawn from the main school and follow predominantly academic courses. Leaders have established an effective organisation which runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Students enjoy their experience in the sixth form; the close community atmosphere helps them to learn well.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form matches that in the main school. The majority of teaching is well planned and helps students to learn quickly. Teachers have

developed the same inclusive and caring approach as in the rest of the school. For this reason, students feel well supported if they struggle with academic work.

- Senior leaders are ambitious for students. They monitor the curriculum carefully and introduce innovations, such as a course run in collaboration with a local football club. Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching in the sixth form regularly. However, they acknowledge there is scope for greater rigour, so that the rate of improvement in teaching in some subjects is increased.
- Since it opened, two cohorts of students have passed through the sixth form. Students' progress across a range of academic courses was around the national average in both 2016 and 2017. However, students make strong progress in A-level English, law and history.
- A small number of students take vocational qualifications. Last year, students' progress on these courses was below average. Senior leaders have taken action to modify these programmes so that current students' progress is better.
- Students follow study programmes which are carefully thought through and matched to their needs and aspirations. These programmes include suitable work-related experiences and enrichment activities to build students' confidence and employability skills.
- Students receive good advice during Year 11 and on induction into the sixth form and so choose suitable courses to study. A high proportion of students stay on their courses at the end of Year 12 and move into Year 13 to complete them. Students are given timely advice about their career options. The proportion of students who secure places in education, employment or training when they leave is above average. The majority of students go on to take places on university courses.
- A very small number of students follow a one-year foundation programme. They are offered a blend of learning in school and at a local college which is designed around their individual needs. These students make good progress from their starting points because of the extra support they receive.
- Through a programme of assemblies and tutorials, staff ensure that students understand how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. Students are encouraged not just to consider their own safety, but also to look out for each other and report any concerns to staff quickly. Senior staff have successfully helped students to develop resilience so that they are better able to cope, for example when they feel anxious about their work.
- Students' attitudes to their learning are generally good. The majority use their independent study time well. However, attendance in the sixth form is not yet high enough.
- Students who join the sixth form without attaining grade 4 in GCSE English and/or mathematics are given suitable tuition to enable them to resit the relevant qualification. Last year, these students made good progress in English and a high proportion attained a grade C. Students' progress in mathematics was less strong.

## School details

Unique reference number	137190
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	10037062

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 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,431
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	266
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jokie Bakker
Headteacher	Robert Linnegar
Telephone number	01793 612727
Website	<a href="http://www.commonweal.co.uk">www.commonweal.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@commonweal.co.uk">admin@commonweal.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	26–27 February 2014

## Information about this school

- A new headteacher was appointed for September 2017. He was previously the deputy headteacher at the school.
- The school opened a sixth form in September 2014 in a purpose built sixth-form centre on the school site.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school has two specialist centres for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Both are managed by the governing body. One is for pupils who have physical disabilities and the other is for pupils who have specific learning difficulties.

- The proportion of pupils who are supported through pupil premium funding is below average.
- The school is part of the 'Swindon challenge' project which supports schools in the local area.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage; however, a significant proportion of pupils are from other ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- A small number of students attend off-site vocational training provision at New College.
- A very small number of pupils who experience behavioural and/or emotional difficulties attend alternative provision at either the Riverside Centre or the Oakfield Project.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11. The school meets the government's minimum standards for sixth-form students' progress.
- 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.

## Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the chair of the governing body and two other governors.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and middle leaders, groups of pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 and students on 16 to 19 study programmes. Inspectors spoke with many pupils and students informally at breaktimes, lunchtimes and after school.
- Inspectors observed learning across a wide range of subjects and age groups. Many observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of pupils' and students' written work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including minutes of governors' meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour logs, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- An inspector visited the Oakfield Project.
- Inspectors took account of 160 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.

## Inspection team

Paul Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Trudi Baker	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Thompson	Ofsted Inspector
Jonathan Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Malcolm Willis	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Arkle	Ofsted Inspector

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