

Verulam School

Brampton Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 4PR

Inspection dates

11–12 October 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
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 an inadequate school

- Safeguarding arrangements at the school are inadequate. Leaders do not ensure that pupils are safe travelling to and arriving at off-site provision.
- Pupils do not conduct themselves well around the school. Some pupils do not behave well in lessons. They 'shout-out' and do not listen to the teacher.
- Opportunities for pupils to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are rare. Pupils do not benefit from a well-structured curriculum.
- The curriculum for pupils' personal, social and emotional development is not effective. Pupils do not learn how to keep themselves safe and how to be tolerant of others.
- Pupils report that they do not feel safe in school because bullying is commonplace. Pupils often make derogatory and homophobic comments to each other and about teachers. Leaders have not done enough to ensure that pupils feel safe.
- Governors have not done enough to ensure that the school promotes tolerance of others. They have not effectively challenged leaders on how to ensure that the curriculum develops pupils' understanding about how to keep safe.

The school has the following strengths

- Outcomes for students are good in the sixth form. Pupils achieve well across the broad spectrum of subjects, in both academic and vocational courses.
- Pupils achieve well at key stage 4. Leaders have a clear understanding of pupils' starting points. This information is used well to track pupils' progress and provide additional support so that aspirational targets are met.
- Results in GCSE examinations are above national figures, and have been for the last three years. Disadvantaged pupils' outcomes had declined slightly more recently, but leaders were alert to the change and rapidly amended their approach. As a result, disadvantaged pupils' achievements have improved.
- Teaching and learning is effective across most subjects. Attendance is above national for all pupil groups. Exclusions are low.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management and the school's safeguarding procedures and ethos by ensuring that:
 - immediate action is taken to tackle discriminatory behaviour
 - pupils who do not feel safe are listened to and their concerns acted upon more swiftly and effectively
 - closer checks are made on the safety of those attending off-site provision
 - risk assessments of activities are robust, and that appropriate actions are taken to mitigate risks to pupils' safety.
- Strengthen pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving the curriculum to ensure that pupils are taught to respect each other and those with protected characteristics, develop greater self-discipline and appreciate the values of good manners and behaviour
 - eradicating poor behaviour in lessons, between lessons and at breaktimes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders have failed to take effective action to ensure that pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare needs are met adequately
- Leaders do not have effective processes in place to monitor and manage pupils travelling to off-site provision. Pupils are unsupervised during travel to physical education lessons, alternative provision and college. Leaders do not check the arrival of pupils at alternative provisions and therefore cannot be sure that pupils are attending.
- Leaders have an inaccurate understanding of how safe pupils feel. They have not taken sufficient steps to ensure that pupils understand that bullying will not be tolerated. Leaders have not ensured that pupils know whom to speak to if they feel unsafe.
- The school has a limited programme in place to promote pupils' understanding of British values, in particular to promote the tolerance of others. Pupils attend assemblies, covering some of the key elements of British values. However, work to follow these up is inconsistently delivered across year groups and is not embedded across the curriculum.
- The curriculum contains an appropriate range of subjects. However, there are weaknesses in relation to the promotion of pupils' personal, social, and health education.
- The headteacher, supported by senior leaders and governors, has an understanding of most of the school's strengths and areas for development. Most parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and those who met with inspectors, believe that the school is well led and managed.
- The impact of pupil premium funding on pupils' outcomes is clear in key stage 4, but less so in key stage 3. Leaders provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 3 who are not meeting the expected standards, but the level of support is of inconsistent quality. At key stage 4, leaders provide more tailored support to match individual needs. This support enables pupils to make better progress.
- Leaders have used Year 7 catch-up funding to employ additional staff to teach English and mathematics. Pupils benefit from additional small-group and one-to-one sessions focused on developing their literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, pupils are provided with additional in-class support from learning support assistants, which is making a positive impact.
- Funding to support pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is spent on providing in-class support, one-to-one focused sessions and group sessions. Leaders have also invested in some external programmes of support to help to address gaps in pupils' learning. These approaches are helping pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to make the good progress expected of them.
- Pupils in Year 11 benefit from effective assemblies which help them to consider the next steps of their learning. Some of these are supported by professionals from industry, and by students from the sixth form. The wider curriculum also helps to ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment

Governance of the school

- The governing body has not fulfilled its duty to ensure the safety of pupils.
- Representatives of the governing body work well with leaders to share with parents, carers and other stakeholders the ethos and vision of the school.
- Governors are highly committed to their work. They receive critical information about pupils' progress from the headteacher and provide sufficient challenge in this area. They are aware of how pupil premium funding is spent, but do not challenge the effectiveness of its expenditure in sufficient depth.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Leaders do not ensure the safety of pupils participating in off-site provision. Pupils attending alternative provision are not supervised when travelling and their attendance is not checked, so leaders do not know if pupils have arrived safely.
- Leaders do not regularly contact the local authority education support team to discuss pupils' medical absence. As a result, leaders do not know about the safety of, and provision for, pupils not attending the school. Leaders have not attended meetings to review pupils' progress, or to review the suitability of provision.
- Pupils walk to off-site physical education provision unsupervised. Leaders do not ensure that staff accompany pupils when they are participating in off-site sport activities. As a consequence, leaders cannot assure the safety of pupils.
- A significant number of pupils, 459 in total, responded to Ofsted's Pupil View questionnaire. Of those, a significant number said they did not feel safe. Leaders are aware that there are concerns about bullying, notably in Year 10, but have not acted quickly to ensure that pupils feel secure and listened to.
- Too many pupils disagreed that there was an adult they could talk to if something was worrying them. The school is immediately putting into place a system of support for pupils. Leaders have now identified key staff that pupils can speak to if they are worried.
- Pupils' behaviour when walking to lessons is not safe; younger pupils are sometimes subjected to intimidation by older pupils. Leaders do not ensure that transitions between lessons, and at breaktimes, are properly supervised. As a result, pupils do not feel safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The vast majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to plan engaging and stimulating lessons. As a result, most pupils, including pupils who are disadvantaged, do well in a range of subjects across the curriculum.
- Leaders have introduced an effective peer- and self-assessment system. As a result, pupils across the school develop the key skills of independence, resilience and self-reflection. Inspectors observed this working very well in mathematics lessons in particular.

- Teachers use their ongoing assessment of pupils' work to make sure that most pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make the good progress expected of them over time.
- Inspectors observed high levels of challenge across all key stages in humanities, where staff probed pupils for deeper understanding. Skilful questioning allows pupils to give considered responses.
- Sometimes pupils become disengaged by the lack of challenge or because they do not understand the work. Typically where teaching and learning is less effective, pupils' work is not matched to their ability and teachers' questioning is weak.
- Inspectors observed positive relationships between pupils and teachers in lessons where there were clear expectations of behaviour. In design and technology, humanities and mathematics, pupils of all ability ranges were engaged and focused. Pupils were confident in their understanding and, where they were unsure, sought clarity from their teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate. Some pupils' attitudes to learning are not positive and this affects the progress that they, and others, make.
- Some pupils do not behave well, or show an appropriate awareness of others, when they are moving around the school, in some lessons and during breaktimes. Other pupils affected by this behaviour do not know how to keep themselves safe. Leaders are not aware of the extent of bullying within the school because pupils do not always report it. They do not have faith that leaders will take effective action.
- The school's curriculum contains insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn about personal, social and health education. The school's assembly programme includes opportunities for the development of pupils' welfare and well-being. It includes themes such as mental health and equality. Inspectors also observed a well-led assembly on 'community' delivered to Year 10 pupils. However, leaders do not ensure that these themes are built upon and successfully supported further through the curriculum. Consequently, pupils are insecure in their knowledge and understanding.
- Leaders do not do enough to ensure that pupils are respectful, understanding and tolerant of each other. A significant minority of pupils consider name-calling and taunting as 'jokes' and do not believe it is serious. Not all pupils accept this as joking.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Pupils, particularly in Year 10, do not feel that leaders protect them from bullying. Leaders have been slow in identifying and tackling the impact that a group of pupils have made on the well-being of their peers. While leaders are making attempts to support and improve the behaviour of this group of pupils, they have failed to recognise

the impact on other pupils. Pupils are unaware of the steps that leaders have taken to address this issue. Consequently, pupils have not felt protected.

- Pupils are not clear about whom to speak to if they are being bullied. Year 11 pupils said it is 'just what happens' and 'that you don't snitch'.
- Some pupils' behaviour affects the ability of other pupils to feel safe at school and to make the progress they are capable of. Pupils' movement around the school is often boisterous and unsettling. During the inspection, inspectors witnessed older pupils taunting younger pupils by obstructing them from moving to class. Inspectors also observed pupils using offensive language to other pupils.
- Leaders and staff have not ensured adequate supervision in key areas of the school during breaktimes and between lessons. As a result, some pupils' behaviour is not monitored.
- In the lessons where teachers manage behaviour well, pupils are engaged. They are motivated by well-planned, relevant activities that stimulate their interest.
- The majority of pupils wear their uniform with pride. The school buildings and facilities are treated with respect by most pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the schools with broadly average outcomes. They make good progress in key stage 3. By the end of Year 11, pupils' progress from their starting points in a range of subjects across the curriculum is typically good. Preparation for the next stage of their education, employment or training is secure for most pupils.
- Groups of pupils currently in the school are performing well in most subjects. However, their progress over time in science, French and Spanish has been typically less strong. Leaders are successfully ensuring that the quality of teaching in these subjects is improving and pupils are making better progress as a result.
- Disadvantaged pupils make strong progress in a range of subjects. A minor dip in outcomes in 2017 at the end key stage 4 has led to a changes in the pattern of learning for some pupils. For example, leaders have provided extra-curricular support in literacy and numeracy and have placed a greater focus on reducing social and emotional barriers to learning. As a result, these pupils are making better progress, as confirmed by the school's own assessment data and samples of their work.
- The most able, and the most able disadvantaged pupils, achieve well in most subjects as a result of the focused, stimulating and challenging teaching they receive.
- Most pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make good progress. Staff typically provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support for these pupils, which improves their confidence and helps them to make accelerated progress.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Verulam is part of the BeauSandVer Trust. In partnership with Beaumont School and Sandringham School, Verulam offers students in the sixth form a broad curriculum. This

relationship contributes positively to the quality of the school's provision, particularly in supporting the moderation of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Effective leadership in the sixth form has led to improved achievement and outcomes. Decisive action following disappointing results in 2016 has led to students making much better progress on courses that are better matched to their ability and interests. Students undertaking vocational courses make good progress, as do those undertaking academic pathways.
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently effective. Leaders have responded rapidly to students' underachievement in some subject areas, including in economics, philosophy and psychology. In these subjects students achieved significantly below the national average in 2016. Unconfirmed results for 2017 indicate significant improvement.
- Having identified boys' achievements as higher than the achievements of girls in a range of subjects, leaders swiftly and effectively addressed this. As a result, girls' achievements now broadly match the achievements of boys. Leaders have ensured that this improvement has been sustained by developing better ways for girls to become integrated into the sixth form, for example through one-to-one mentoring and sporting events for boys and girls. Students report that these approaches have been helpful to them.
- In the sixth form, the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered to students helps them to develop into self-confident young people. Students benefit from additional study sessions and sporting activities. Effective careers guidance helps to prepare them for their next steps when they leave Verulam. 'Friday lectures' from industry professionals provide students in the sixth form with expert advice about university pathways and apprenticeships.
- Sixth-form students are active school leaders. They support younger pupils through mentoring and additional study. Students lead assemblies and help to organise and lead whole-school sporting events.

School details

Unique reference number	137038
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10036225

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	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1147
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Kennedy
Headteacher	Paul Ramsey
Telephone number	01727 766100
Website	www.verulamschool.co.uk
Email address	paul.ramsey@verulam.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 March 2014

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.
- The school is an academy converter. The sixth form is part of a consortium with Sandringham School and Beaumont School and is known as 'BeauSandVer'.
- Some pupils attend alternative provision provided by LINKS, the Education Support Teams for Medical Absence (ESTMA) and Oaklands College.
- The school is a larger than an average-sized secondary school. The majority of students are White British. The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is also below average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 53 lessons in all year groups, in subjects across the curriculum. Joint observations with members of the school's leadership team were undertaken.
- Responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires from 459 pupils, 382 parents and 67 staff were considered.
- Meetings and discussions were held with the headteacher and other school leaders. Discussions were had with the alternative provision provider LINKS, ESTMA and Oaklands College. Further meetings were held with parents and the governing body.
- The inspection team scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's safeguarding and child protection policy documents and risk assessment documentation for off-site provision. Checks on the school's development plans, the minutes of governing body meetings and checks on the quality of learning, teaching and assessment were also completed.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils from every year group of the school. Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, around the school site during breaktimes, lunchtimes and during transition between lessons.

Inspection team

Gwyneth Gibson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sally Pemberton	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Bell	Ofsted Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Ofsted Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector
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