

The Cedars Academy

Wanlip Lane, Birstall, Leicester, Leicestershire LE4 4GH

Inspection dates

17–18 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors have managed the amalgamation of two schools effectively, and created a cohesive, unified school community.
- Leaders, governors, staff and pupils are working together to realise the headteacher's ambitions for pupils' success.
- Pupils in all year groups make rapid progress in a range of subjects. The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving considerably.
- The sixth form is a strength of the school. Students make very good progress and are well prepared for the next steps in their education, employment or training.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are supported extremely well in all aspects of school life. They make good progress.
- Leaders have amended the curriculum to ensure that it meets pupils' differing needs. It is challenging in all key stages.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge, which they use well to motivate and interest pupils.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very positive. Pupils feel encouraged to take risks in their learning, which helps them to make progress.
- The academy trust provides extremely effective support. Pupils benefit from a range of enriching activities. Staff appreciate the professional development they receive from other schools in the trust and from trust leaders.
- Pastoral support is very strong. Considerable emphasis is placed on pupils' personal development and well-being. The school is caring, welcoming and inclusive.
- Leaders understand their roles and responsibilities. New senior leaders, and middle leaders, are being supported to further develop their effectiveness.
- There are small pockets of weaker teaching where activities are not challenging enough. Some low-level disruption occasionally results when teachers do not apply the behaviour policy.
- The most able pupils do not always understand how to improve their work or achieve the highest grades. Not all teachers apply the feedback policy effectively.
- Attendance is similar to the national average. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities is lower.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - all teachers plan activities which challenge and meet the needs of all groups of pupils
 - teachers routinely apply the feedback policy and ensure that pupils understand what they need to do to improve
 - the most able pupils understand what they need to do to achieve the highest grades.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - middle leaders take greater responsibility for leading improvements in their areas of responsibility
 - new leaders are supported to be fully effective in their roles.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently apply the school's behaviour policy
 - embedding strategies already in place to further improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have maintained a good quality of education during the complex process of amalgamating two schools. The headteacher has communicated high expectations for pupils' achievement and success in all aspects of school life. He is determined to raise pupils' aspirations and improve their life chances. These aims are shared by staff who fully support the headteacher in working to realise these goals.
- The headteacher is ably supported by senior leaders in the school and by leaders and staff from the Lionheart Academies Trust. There is clear and effective collaboration between school and trust staff.
- The headteacher has restructured the senior leadership team. All are clear about leaders' roles and responsibilities. Several leaders are new to their posts and are beginning to effect tangible improvements.
- Considerable emphasis is placed on the strategy to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders allocate the pupil premium funding appropriately and maintain a clear focus on widening pupils' experiences and supporting their progress. Disadvantaged pupils who are currently in the school are making rapid progress.
- Leadership of the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is a strength of the school. The special educational needs coordinator has a strategic overview and monitors the impact of teaching and support on pupils' progress. Additional funding is allocated thoughtfully and evaluated thoroughly.
- Considerable work has been undertaken to improve the quality of the curriculum in all key stages and subjects. Staff who are new to teaching key stage 4 pupils have received training to prepare them to deliver new GCSE specifications. Schemes of learning at key stage 3 have been redesigned to ensure that pupils are challenged. Leaders continue to review and amend the curriculum to ensure that it meets the needs of all groups of pupils.
- The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to widen and develop their experiences. The extra-curricular programme is extensive, offering a variety of cultural, artistic and sporting activities. Pupils are encouraged to participate in enriching experiences, such as the 'classics club'. Pupils appreciate and enjoy these opportunities.
- Leaders of teaching, learning and assessment have an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in this area of the school's work. Leaders' evaluation informs staff training and development activities.
- Leaders have devised an appropriate programme for staff development and training. Staff value these opportunities and say that they have helped them to develop their practice. Teachers are held to account for the quality of their work and its impact on pupils' outcomes. Underperforming staff are supported and challenged to improve.
- Performance management processes are robust. Teachers are set clear and appropriate targets, against which their performance is thoroughly evaluated.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of

fundamental British values are promoted well by all staff. For example, pupils study the theme of democracy and the role of Parliament in humanities lessons.

- Middle leaders are beginning to take greater responsibility for developing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the areas for which they are responsible. For example, they conduct termly faculty reviews in collaboration with senior leaders. Middle leaders also report to members of the governing body following their analysis of examination results.

Governance of the school

- Governors share leaders' ambitions for pupils' success. They are passionate about the school and committed to supporting continued improvements.
- Governors understand the requirements and responsibilities of their role. They are actively involved in supporting aspects of the school's work, such as attending community events. They also recognise the need to adopt a strategic role in monitoring and challenging leaders' work.
- There is a wide range of knowledge and expertise among members of the governing body. This is effectively used by the careful allocation of link governors to key aspects of the school's work.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have the skills to hold leaders to account and do so effectively. For example, they monitor the allocation of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding and challenge leaders on its impact.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The designated safeguarding leader is well supported by an extensive team of trained staff. Pastoral staff liaise closely with the safeguarding team, which ensures that all are kept up to date with developments and concerns.
- Leaders have developed positive relationships with parents, carers and families which support the work of the safeguarding team.
- Staff have received up-to-date training. All staff recognise and embrace their responsibilities to safeguard pupils. Pupils feel that staff are available to support and help them when concerns arise.
- Records relating to safeguarding are detailed and thorough. Leaders involve a range of external agencies appropriately and are tenacious in following up referrals. This means that action to support pupils is swift.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers are enthusiastic and keen to share their very good subject knowledge with pupils. Positive relationships between staff and pupils support teaching and learning.
- All teachers maintain an up-to-date 'context for learning' sheet which details the profile of each class. Teachers have a detailed knowledge and understanding of individual

pupils. They have developed approaches to support the differing abilities and needs in their classes.

- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are effectively supported in lessons. Teaching assistants work well with pupils to support their learning and independence.
- Teachers are very encouraging and support pupils to develop their confidence. Pupils are keen to participate and to take risks in their learning. They are prepared to 'have a go', even if this means they make mistakes. This leads to effective learning and good progress.
- Teachers make good use of questioning and discussion to develop pupils' understanding and reasoning. Pupils participate well and are keen to share their ideas.
- Most teachers plan well-structured lessons which interest and motivate pupils. They use their knowledge about what pupils can do to plan activities to challenge them. For example, Year 7 pupils were drawing drinks cans in a graphics lesson. The most able pupils were encouraged to crush their cans to experiment and test their drawing skills.
- Considerable work has been undertaken to develop the curriculum in key stage 3 to ensure that it is challenging. This is particularly evident in mathematics and English, where pupils study complex concepts and ideas. Most pupils say that they feel challenged by their work.
- The recently amended feedback policy is not consistently applied by all staff. Not all pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work in all subjects. Leaders have identified the need to improve the impact of teachers' feedback in some areas.
- The most able pupils do not know how to meet the requirements of the higher grades in all of the subjects they are studying, particularly at key stage 4. Increasing the proportion of pupils who achieve the higher grades has already been identified as a priority by leaders and plans are in place to bring about improvements.
- There are small pockets of weaker teaching, where teachers do not plan activities which motivate pupils or ensure that work is accurately matched to pupils' different abilities. Leaders are aware of staff who are in need of further development to improve their practice and are taking appropriate action to support and challenge these teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Staff are extremely caring and a sense of nurture permeates the school. Tutors and the pastoral team provide effective support to all pupils. A variety of external agencies are used to provide additional and bespoke support where needed.
- Pupils are confident and polite. They are proud to be members of the school. They are mature in their dealings with others. For example, pupils were able to offer constructive criticism of others' work in a Year 7 design and technology lesson.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. There is an increased understanding of what constitutes bullying, although leaders recognise that

further work is required. Nevertheless, bullying is rare and pupils are confident that staff would deal with any incidents effectively and swiftly, should they occur.

- Leaders have ensured that pupils follow an extensive tutor programme to promote their personal development and welfare. Pupils are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles. For example, in an assembly, inspectors observed pupils reflecting on physical and mental health issues.
- The very small number of pupils who attend off-site, alternative provision are well supported to promote their personal development and well-being. Regular contact between the school and providers ensures that pupils' needs are met.
- Considerable focus is placed on celebrating pupils' achievements and rewarding positive behaviour. Pupils appreciate the balance between rewards and sanctions.
- Pupils have a good understanding of diversity. They are respectful of views that differ from their own. The school is welcoming and inclusive.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Leaders introduced a set of expectations of behaviour in September 2017. These have been clearly communicated to pupils and staff and are understood by all. Pupils have responded well and aim to meet these high expectations.
- Pupils approach school life with a sense of purpose. They are punctual in the morning and to each lesson throughout the day. They respond quickly to instructions and are also independent and motivated.
- Leaders track and monitor the use of exclusions carefully. Increased expectations of behaviour have resulted in an increase in fixed-term exclusions. Leaders are supporting a small number of challenging pupils, to modify and improve their behaviour. Pastoral support, in this aspect of the school's work, is strong.
- Whole-school attendance is consistently above the national average. However, disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities do not attend as regularly as their peers. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent from school is falling but remains higher than the national average.
- The vast majority of pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around school. Where teaching is weaker, there is some low-level disruption. This is further compounded by a few teachers who do not consistently apply the behaviour policy.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Current pupils, in all year groups, are making rapid progress in a range of subjects. Work in pupils' books and leaders' tracking information indicates that pupils' outcomes in 2018 will exceed those achieved in previous years.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved in key stage 3. Pupils are now entering key stage 4 better prepared for the demands of GCSE. Expectations for future cohorts are high.
- Considerable work has been undertaken, in recent years, to improve the outcomes for

disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. These groups of pupils are making much faster progress than has been seen in the past. There is no discernible difference in the quality of work and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils who are currently in the school compared to others.

- In 2017, pupils' progress overall was broadly average. Their attainment in English and mathematics was also similar to that achieved by pupils nationally.
- Pupils who enter the school with literacy and numeracy levels below those typical for their age are well supported to catch up with their peers. Pupils make good progress as a result of effective intervention and additional tuition.
- In 2017, pupils who had an education, health and care plan made more rapid progress than all pupils nationally. Their progress in mathematics was particularly strong. However, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities but did not have an education, health and care plan made considerably less progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils have made less progress than other pupils nationally in the past. In 2017, their outcomes in humanities, languages and science were considerably below national averages. In English and mathematics, this group of pupils achieved approximately half a grade below other pupils nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who achieved a strong pass in English and mathematics, in 2017, was lower than the national average.
- The most able pupils made less progress than others in the past. Leaders are aware and plans are in place to improve rates of progress for this group of pupils.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is a strength of the school. Leaders and staff have high ambitions for students' success. Students feel well supported and they make very good progress in all aspects of their development.
- Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the teaching and the curriculum. They take appropriate and effective action to improve areas in need of further development.
- Teaching is strong in the sixth form. Teachers are extremely knowledgeable and passionate about their subject. This is reflected in students' enthusiasm and engagement in their learning.
- Extremely good use is made of discussion in lessons. Teachers use questioning very well and encourage students to take responsibility for the direction and progression of debate and discussion. For example, students in a Year 13 literature lesson were discussing complex themes of morality. The teacher managed the discussion with gentle prompts, which supported students to develop their own argument and further their interpretation of the text.
- Students make very good progress in academic and vocational subjects. In 2017, outcomes for students were above national averages. Current students are also making very good progress and leaders expect outcomes to improve further this year. Students make particularly strong progress in performing arts, sociology and psychology.
- Although very few students need to resit GCSE English and mathematics, those who do

make very good progress.

- Students participate in an effective tutor programme which covers a range of subjects to support them in taking the next steps in their education, employment or training. A variety of enrichment activities supports their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes. All students in the sixth form undertake appropriate work experience, linked to their interests and future plans.
- Students' conduct is very good and younger pupils view sixth-form students as role models. Students act as ambassadors at school and trust events, and undertake activities to support younger pupils. For example, many are 'reading buddies' to pupils who attend primary schools in the trust.
- Pastoral support is strong in the sixth form. Tutors know their students well and positive relationships support students' personal development and well-being.
- Students value their education and recognise the importance of attending regularly and punctually. Attendance rates are above the national averages. The very small minority of pupils who are persistently absent are challenged and supported to attend every day.
- Leaders track students' destinations and support them to move on to their next steps. For example, tutors support students in making their university applications. Students appreciate and value this support. In 2017, all students progressed to placements.
- Retention rates in the sixth form are above the national averages. However, leaders have identified this as an area in need of improvement. They recognise that ineffective guidance in the past meant that a number of students did not complete their courses in 2017. Nevertheless, all those affected were supported to move on to alternative courses. Leaders have taken effective action to ensure that students receive high-quality advice and guidance.

School details

Unique reference number	140787
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	10036063

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 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	900
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	57
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Christine Swan
Headteacher	Jason Smith
Telephone number	01162677107
Website	www.TheCedarsAcademy.org.uk
Email address	schoolenquiries@thecedarsacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Cedars Academy opened in September 2015, following the merger of Stonehill High School and Longslade Community School. It is part of the Lionheart Academies Trust (LAT). Governance is provided by the trust and a local governing body.
- LAT provides a range of formal support to all aspects of the school's work.
- The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is average. The majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is above

average. The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and who do not have an education, health and care plan is below average.

- A small number of pupils attend off-site alternative provision at the Melton Learning Hub.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' achievement and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 35 lessons, some jointly with senior leaders.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, other staff, members of the governing body and the chief executive officer from the Lionheart Academies Trust.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and a sample of pupils' books.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime. Inspectors also observed pupils' learning and behaviour in assemblies and tutorial periods.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils, from all year groups, in discussion groups and informally around the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, its improvement plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body, information about the attainment and progress of all pupils, records relating to behaviour and safeguarding, and information on the school's website.
- Inspectors considered the 22 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and the 47 free-text responses from parents. They also considered the results of a school-conducted survey of parents' views.

Inspection team

Deborah Mosley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tim Croft	Ofsted Inspector
Jackie Thornalley	Ofsted Inspector
Bernice Astling	Ofsted Inspector

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