

Sandye Place Academy

Park Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1JD

Inspection dates

13–14 December 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The academy trust and the governing body have not sufficiently challenged or held leaders to account for the widening gap between pupils' outcomes and national standards.
- Although assessment systems are now providing more accurate information about the progress pupils make, leaders and governors have not used it sharply enough to secure the rapid improvements needed.
- Monitoring of teaching is weak because leaders focus too narrowly on what teachers do, rather than the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and progress.
- Teachers do not consistently apply the school's behaviour code. As a result, some pupils waste time in lessons.
- The school's use of pupil premium funding is not effective in improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils. Their achievement has been consistently low over time.
- Standards are too low. The results of national tests for pupils at the end of Year 6 were low in both 2016 and 2017 and particularly poor in writing in 2017.
- Pupils do not make fast enough progress in Years 7 and 8. As a result, pupils are not well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Although the quality of teaching and learning is improving, teachers are not clear enough about exactly what they want pupils to know, understand and be able to do in lessons.
- Actions to improve reading and writing rely too heavily on a limited range of strategies, such as reading quizzes and improving punctuation. As a result, the most able pupils are not challenged enough.
- The achievement of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is inadequate. Leaders do not check that the day-to-day actions being taken are working.

The school has the following strengths

- Parents, carers, pupils and staff say they feel happy and safe. Pupils respond positively to the variety of opportunities the school offers.
- The school's own assessments and the work in some pupils' books indicate that actions taken to improve mathematics since the last inspection are bringing about improvements.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and outside. They look smart in their uniforms, readily take on leadership roles and are proud of their school.
- The governing body and academy trust have had a recent change of membership. New governors know the size of the task and are demonstrating more challenge to leaders.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in improving outcomes and raising achievement by:
 - securing the external support and challenge the school needs to have a realistic view of how well it is doing
 - making sure that leaders accurately assess the quality of pupils' learning by focusing on exactly what pupils know, understand and can do in lessons
 - ensuring that school leaders analyse assessment information effectively and present their findings clearly to enable other leaders and governors to understand the main issues in performance
 - ensuring that the support provided both for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and for disadvantaged pupils is evaluated to check its impact on pupils' learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan precisely what pupils are expected to know, understand and be able to do
 - focus just as much on the quality of what pupils write as they do on improving punctuation
 - make more use of high-quality texts in lessons to help develop pupils' reading skills in more depth
 - use the school's behaviour code consistently well to ensure a greater focus on learning in lessons.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspectors recommend that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders have not addressed pupils' underachievement over the past three years with sufficient urgency. As a result, too few pupils attain in line with national expectations or make the progress they should.
- Changes in the membership of the trust mean that some of the previous support from one school to another is no longer in place. Leaders and governors have not secured the external support and challenge needed to have an accurate view of how well the school is doing.
- Changes to the governing body and academy trust have further directed attention away from the key task of improving the school. All trustees are also governors. The lines of accountability are not clear. Effective support and challenge for the school are not in place.
- Leaders in the school have an unrealistic view of how well it is doing, and governors have not secured the external challenge needed to ensure that expectations are high enough. Leaders have not had a sharp enough focus on improving pupils' outcomes. As a result, pupils achieve well below other pupils nationally.
- For the past year, the principal of the school has also acted as executive headteacher of Maple Tree Lower School. Oversight of the two schools, while bringing some benefits, has led to a loss of focus and further decline at Sandye Place Academy.
- The findings of the inspectors about the school were reflected in parents' positive and negative comments. Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the culture of the school, referring to concern for the whole child, a nurturing environment and improvements in their child's confidence. Negative comments related to a lack of clarity over reports to parents on their child's progress, the decline they had seen in standards at the school over the past three years and that the very poor outcomes in 2017, particularly in writing, had not been explained to parents.
- The school has not ensured that disadvantaged pupils are doing as well as other pupils nationally. The school's report of how they have spent the additional funding is too general and does not link spending to the impact it makes on pupils' outcomes. Leaders' evaluation of spending lacks clarity.
- Leaders do not ensure that additional support for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is being routinely checked. Therefore, leaders do not know how well these pupils achieve.
- The school has improved some aspects of assessment as recommended from the last inspection. Some internal assessments are now more reliable, particularly in mathematics and, more recently, in reading. However, the school does not make effective use of information on how well pupils are doing. There are a number of different approaches and a lack of clarity about what the information is telling the school. Governors and parents also commented on the lack of clarity in how the school presented information to show how well different groups of pupils are doing in different years in the school.

- The school has a culture of developing teaching in the school. Leaders are clear about the features they expect to see in lessons and teachers are clear about their areas for development and are keen to improve their practice. However, this has led to a focus on what teachers are doing, rather than on what pupils are learning. This has meant that leaders have an unrealistic view about the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school.
- There are some strengths in the school's wider curriculum. Pupils in Year 5 spoke highly of the opportunities they had, particularly in the performing arts, physical education and science. Enrichment time each Friday is highly valued by the pupils and they listed skills they had developed in areas such as dance, woodwork and knitting.
- Staff spoken to, and those responding to the Ofsted staff survey, were positive about the school. New staff to the school and newly qualified teachers were positive about the induction, training and support that they had received. All teachers have a head of department and a 'developer', and this enables there to be a broad base of support and challenge. Consequently, inspectors recommend that the school may appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- A new chair and vice-chair of governors from within the governing body were appointed in July 2017. Along with the chair of the finance committee, who was a chair of governors previously, the three governors are the only members of the academy trust. They are committed to the school and have some of the skills required to take the school forward. However, they lack the crucial support and challenge needed to improve provision and raise achievement, including to the governance and academy trust structures.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's records are detailed and appropriate. Records of checks, recruitment and staff training are kept up to date. Governors also check these records. The school has practical plans for ensuring that, at all times, those on-site know which person they should refer any safeguarding concerns to.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Pupils and staff understand the importance of safety and safeguarding.
- Pupils are supervised well during lunchtime and breaks.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inconsistent in different year groups and across subjects. Teaching does not focus closely enough on how well pupils are learning.
- Teachers tell pupils what they expect them to do in lessons. However, these outcomes are generally procedural, such as 'using the punctuation bar' or 'including a particular

aspect of grammar'. Teachers do not make clear enough their expectations of pupils or the standards they are expected to achieve.

- Teaching has improved very recently across a number of subjects, including reading and mathematics. In mathematics, actions based on the recommendations from the previous inspection are beginning to show impact. For example, there is a strong focus on pupils using and applying their mathematical skills, and some consistent approaches are being used, particularly in Year 5. Improvements in reading are even more recent, but there are signs that pupils are beginning to become more confident. It is too early to gauge the impact of these improvements on improving pupils' outcomes.
- Teaching in art, physical education, French and the performing arts sometimes makes effective use of the subject specialists within the school. This is having the greatest impact in Year 5, where expectations of what pupils can achieve are consistently high and pupils respond to this. However, expectations are not consistently high enough across all subjects and year groups, and too many pupils lack focus in lessons and do not complete work.
- Teachers usually try to check pupils' understanding by asking them to show if they grasp a particular teaching point. However, teachers do not check pupils' understanding rigorously enough. This means that teachers do not adjust teaching quickly enough and this limits the amount of progress that pupils make.
- The school's policy for assessment uses a system of achievement, improvement and response – 'AIR'. However, evidence from pupils' work shows that the assessment policy is at an early stage of development and it is not having the intended impact of improving pupils' work consistently well.
- Teaching does not focus on outcomes clearly enough for groups of pupils such as disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and most-able pupils. Leaders do not use the school's assessment information sharply enough to identify where different groups may not be doing as well as they can. The narrow range of strategies for improving reading and writing are not improving outcomes for the most able pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Parents, staff, pupils and governors all speak highly about the positive and open culture of the school and what it means to them. Pupils were clear about the opportunities they had at Sandye Place Academy, particularly the range of subjects they studied and the extra opportunities they had outside the classroom with sports and performing arts. Year 5 pupils were clear about what they had gained from coming to Sandye Place Academy.
- Building pupils' confidence and resilience is at the heart of the school's ethos. This shows in the way many pupils approach their learning and particularly in the commitment they show to the weekly enrichment lessons and in activities outside of the classroom.

- A unique aspect of pupils' positive personal development is seen in the number of different pupils looking after the chickens at breaks and lunchtimes. Pupils supervised each other, independently of adults, and knew what to do, including how to handle the chickens and the need to wash their hands afterwards.
- Parents are positive about the regular celebration assemblies they attend. A few parents commented that middle-attaining or quiet children are sometimes overlooked and that 'praise points' are not awarded in a consistent way.
- Pupils are clear about different types of bullying and are confident in the school's ability to help if there are any incidents. Pupils act as peer mentors to new Year 5 pupils at breaks and lunchtimes, and older pupils wear their 'prefect' jumpers with pride.
- Many pupils enjoy reading. The books in the entrance hall and the library are in constant use. Pupils choose to use these spaces during their lunchtimes and they work well together and with other adults.
- Pupils look smart and wear their uniform with pride. A change to the uniform, with more formal shirts, ties and blazers, is optional and pupils and parents were positive about the way this was introduced by the school.
- Pupils feel safe and the school teaches them how to stay safe both physically and when using the internet and mobile telephones.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Some pupils lose focus in lessons and start chatting, particularly when teachers do not explain tasks clearly enough or when teachers are not clear about the quality of work they are expecting pupils to complete in the time given.
- The school has a clear system for managing behaviour which is understood well by the pupils. This has led to a reduction in the number of behaviour incidents in the school and the number of internal and fixed-term exclusions. However, teachers are not using the school's behaviour system consistently well enough to ensure that pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and work hard in their lessons.
- Pupils behave well between lessons, outside and at lunchtimes in the dining room. They are punctual to school and to lessons.
- Attendance improved in 2015/16 to well above national levels, but fell in 2016/17. Attendance for different groups, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, was also worse in 2016/17. It has improved for these groups during this year, but is still not back to previous levels.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- In the national assessments for key stage 2 in 2017, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected and higher standard in reading, writing and mathematics was well below average. Pupils' progress overall in reading, writing and mathematics for 2017 is in the lowest 20% of schools nationally.
- The progress of pupils in the school is variable across a range of subjects due to the

lack of teachers' focus on pupils' learning in lessons. Progress is better in Years 5 and 6 than in Years 7 and 8. This is as a result of the better information the school now has about the pupils' starting points and the higher expectations teachers now have for pupils in these year groups.

- Pupils' progress is typically stronger in art, physical education, French and the performing arts. Inspectors saw consistently high standards in drama. Outcomes are showing some very early signs of improvement in reading and mathematics, especially for the current Year 5. However, the legacy of poorer outcomes in previous years is still seen, particularly for pupils in Year 8. Outcomes in writing are too low in all year groups and this is negatively affecting outcomes across a range of other subjects.
- School assessment information and pupils' work show that pupils make steady progress in Years 5 and 6 but, by the end of Year 6, standards are still well below average. Progress is weaker in Years 7 and 8 so that, by the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8, they are still below age-related expectations.
- School data shows that catch-up work in Year 7 is more successful in mathematics than in English. Leaders and teachers have identified some common patterns involving pupils' poor problem-solving skills and are beginning to address these.
- The school has identified that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are too low in reading, writing and mathematics and inspectors agree. The funding is not used effectively enough and the school has only recently prioritised this as an area for improvement.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make inadequate progress. Leaders do not use the school's information effectively to measure the effectiveness of their actions to improve pupils' progress.
- The strategies the school is using to improve pupils' reading and writing skills are having a positive impact for the most able pupils. However, outcomes for the most able pupils are not improving quickly enough.

School details

Unique reference number	136541
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10040570

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	496
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Hannah Ranson
Principal	Kim McCamley
Telephone number	01767 680 420
Website	www.sandyepplaceacademy.org.uk/
Email address	s.kane@spacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 April–1 May 2014

Information about this school

- The school converted to an academy in 2011. The school's academy trust is called Sandye Place Academy Trust.
- The school had been an associate member of a local cluster of schools called the Pinnacle Trust since 2011. This included a local upper school, Sandye Place Academy and six lower schools.
- The school is a middle deemed secondary school and has pupils from Year 5 to Year 8. It has five forms of entry in Years 6, 7 and 8. Numbers in the current Year 5 are lower than other year groups. A contributing factor is that two local lower schools have extended their age ranges from September 2017 to become primary schools and have admitted pupils to Year 5 for the first time.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- About a quarter of pupils in the school are disadvantaged. This is in line with the national average.

- The school did not meet the government's floor standards in 2016, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in key stage 2.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 2 academic performance results in 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Three inspectors were on-site for two days. In addition, one inspector carried out quality assurance of the inspection.
- Inspectors made observations of teaching during 24 visits to lessons, including two jointly with the principal and five shorter visits to lessons with the vice-principal. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work and talked to pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors talked to two groups of Year 5 pupils and one group of Year 7 pupils chosen by the inspectors.
- Inspectors visited two parent celebration assemblies and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors talked to pupils around the school, in the dining hall, outside and in the library. Inspectors also saw pupils rehearsing for the school show.
- Meetings were held with the lead for safeguarding, the head of mathematics and the second in charge of English. Meetings were also held with the principal and vice-principal about the school's assessment systems and outcomes for pupils, with the coordinator for SEN on provision and outcomes for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and with the vice-principal on the leadership and management of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Meetings were held with three members of the academy trust and two of these members are also the chair and vice-chair of governors. Meetings were held with a governor representing the local authority and with the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors considered 94 parental responses to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, and the 66 written comments.
- Inspectors also considered 20 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.

Inspection team

Anne Pepper, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Barr	Ofsted Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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