

Court Fields School

Mantle Street, Wellington, Somerset TA21 8SW

Inspection dates

20–21 March 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Over the last two years, pupils, from all starting points, have not made sufficiently good progress by the end of Year 11.
- Disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and boys are not making as much progress as their peers.
- Leaders' self-evaluation, while comprehensive and detailed, lacks coherence and clarity. It is difficult to gauge which strategies to improve teaching and learning are working and which are not. This includes the use of the additional funding provided to support disadvantaged pupils.
- The quality of teaching is improving. There are many examples of effective practice. However, there is still too much variation. Therefore, teaching overall is not consistently and rapidly raising standards.
- Teachers do not routinely plan lessons that are well-matched to pupils' prior understanding or their needs. The use of assessment is not always supporting pupils to build on what they already know.
- The most able pupils are not challenged appropriately so that they reach the high standards of which they are capable.
- Pupils are compliant, but do not always readily take the initiative or responsibility for their learning.
- Governors ask the right questions of school leaders, but do not probe incisively enough. Consequently, they are not fully informed of the impact of leaders' actions to improve the quality of teaching.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND who are persistently absent is too high.
- A significant minority of parents and carers are dissatisfied with aspects of the school's work.

The school has the following strengths

- This is a school that is showing signs of improving. Leaders' concerted efforts have improved behaviour and the rates of attendance overall. Academic standards are rising in some year groups and in some areas of the curriculum.
- Leaders have recruited wisely to teaching and middle leadership posts. Middle leaders, both academically and pastorally, are committed and well placed to support senior leaders to make more rapid improvement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
 - refining strategic planning so that there is a greater coherence and clarity about the impact of actions, particularly to improve the quality of teaching and learning
 - trustees and governors continuing to challenge leaders, making explicit the actions agreed and the timescales for review, so that more rapid improvement is secured
 - leaders sustaining recent improvements and sharing effective practice within the school to reduce variations in teachers' practice
 - communicating more effectively with parents to improve the quality of relationships.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make better progress through each year group, by:
 - developing teachers' skills in using assessment information to plan and adapt their teaching so that it meets the needs of all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and boys
 - providing sufficient and consistent challenge so that the most able pupils can excel.
- Improve the quality of personal development and behaviour, by:
 - continuing to challenge those pupils who do not attend school regularly
 - ensuring that teaching challenges and entuses pupils to be more readily involved in their learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Although school leaders have secured some improvements since the previous inspection, this has not been rapid enough. This is, in part, due to instability in staffing and the need to challenge a legacy of weaker practice. While these have been factors, leaders' self-evaluation of school performance has lacked cohesion, and challenge by governors has not been incisive enough to ensure that strategies are having the intended effect.
- The multi-academy trust has provided effective support for the school to increase leadership capacity. Leaders from the trust have worked with school leaders to enable them to draw more widely from effective practice and to formulate strategic plans. For example, the 'Elevate' programme to support pupils who fall behind, particularly disadvantaged pupils, is well conceived, but is yet to demonstrate its full potential on improving the academic outcomes of such pupils.
- Leaders have correctly identified the priorities for improvement. They are honest and committed to improving standards. They now have a better understanding of the progress pupils make and they are confident in the accuracy of this information. Leaders have detailed plans in place to address the weaknesses that still exist. However, the complexity of these plans, and the consequent lack of clarity, mean that it is difficult for leaders to pinpoint which strategies are working and which are not. The emphasis has been too much on the actions taken rather than the impact of these actions.
- Leaders have demonstrated the ability to tackle ineffective practice. There is a suitable blend of challenge and support and this has been successful in raising standards in some areas of the curriculum. Nonetheless, this situation is ongoing and has resulted in too many classes not having their regular teacher, or pupils experiencing practice that is not good enough. This is a concern shared by parents and pupils and has had a detrimental effect on pupils' experiences and progress in some subjects.
- Leaders' focus on improving the behaviour and attendance of pupils has created an environment where pupils can learn effectively. Pastoral middle leaders have been effective in their roles and, as a result, there has been demonstrable improvement made. Thus, the strategy is well founded. However, teachers have not yet fully been able to demonstrate that they are using this platform to secure better pupil progress.
- Middle leaders are knowledgeable about their subject areas. They feel well supported by senior leaders and are now more confident to tackle the inconsistencies that exist within and between departments. However, they are too focused on overall assessment information and ensuring compliance, rather than evaluating how teaching in their subject is promoting good learning. As a group, they demonstrate the enthusiasm and understanding needed to support senior leaders to generate a greater momentum for school improvement.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils remains a key priority for the school. Leaders have implemented a more consistent approach to identifying the needs of such pupils and identified the barriers that exist to their learning. This has been successful,

for example, in improving the progress pupils make in mathematics. However, while teachers adopt the agreed approach, they do not always use this information astutely to inform their planning. Therefore, disadvantaged pupils do not always receive the support they need to enable them to make the academic progress they should.

- Pupils with SEND are beginning to make better progress from their starting points, but this is still not strong enough. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is increasingly knowledgeable about the needs of pupils and is working to overcome the weaknesses of the past. The nurture provision and the Achievement for All centre provide effective support for pupils with complex needs. However, there is still some way to go for teachers to consistently demonstrate that they can adapt their planning and their pedagogy to better meet the needs of these pupils.
- Leaders understand the importance of promoting the well-being of staff so that they can fulfil their roles effectively. Newly qualified teachers feel well supported and are enthusiastic about beginning their teaching careers at the school. A minority of staff, however, do express some concerns about the support they receive.
- Leaders have developed the curriculum so that pupils consider issues that are pertinent to their well-being. The programme is well structured, but leaders have not yet fully evaluated the quality of teacher's delivery, so some of this is variable. Where teachers follow the programme well, pupils are confident, articulate and able to give thoughtful responses. Where this is less successful, pupils' ability to express their views is more limited.
- There are many extra-curricular activities and leaders ensure that there is equality of opportunity. Teachers encourage pupils to develop their interests and skills, as well as take on leadership responsibilities. For example, sports leaders were observed working enthusiastically with primary school pupils during the inspection. When pupils are given these opportunities, they respond positively and can explain the benefits to themselves and to others.

Governance of the school

- The chief executive of the multi-academy trust has a realistic understanding of where the school is and what remains to be done. She is working closely with school leaders, providing support to develop their skills and enabling them to access resources to make improvements at the pace required.
- The trustees have provided effective guidance for the governing body since the previous inspection. They have worked closely with new governors to develop their confidence in asking the right questions of school leaders. There is now a move to provide the local governing body with greater autonomy but, while structures are evolving, trustees continue to regularly scrutinise the work of the school.
- Governors show a commitment to the school and a determination to see more rapid improvement. They recognise that this has not been swift enough and are aware of the imperative to remedy this.
- Governors meet with staff and pupils to gather a first-hand account of the quality of education the school provides. They have identified key areas for further scrutiny and their challenge has been effective in improving aspects of the school's work. However,

governors' challenge is insufficiently probing, particularly concerning the impact of actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning. There is still a lack of precision about the actions agreed and when the result of these will be reviewed.

- Governors are aware that a significant minority of parents and carers express concerns about many aspects of the school's work. They understand the need to cultivate positive relationships and are seeking to extend opportunities to engage with parents and carers in a constructive way.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have taken steps to ensure that the site is secure, and that staff are vigilant when on duty.
- Governors and leaders fully understand their safeguarding responsibilities and ensure that a culture of vigilance underpins all aspects of the school's work. Staff know the potential signs of concern and understand how to use the school's system to report this. Training is up to date and incorporates regular briefings and assessments to ensure that staff are aware of pertinent issues, including protecting pupils from radicalisation and exploitation.
- Senior leaders follow appropriate safeguarding processes and keep detailed records, including referrals made to the local authority. Staff who have received training in safer recruitment ensure that adults who apply to join the school are suitable.
- Checks are made on pupils who attend alternative provision or who have a personalised timetable. Staff work proactively with external agencies to ensure that pupils are well supported in times of need. Leaders keep clear records of actions taken and challenge when they are not satisfied with the resolution.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Leaders now monitor classroom practice more effectively and consequently know the areas of strength and those that require improvement. Teachers have up to date information about pupils' needs and have identified strategies to support them. However, while teachers are largely compliant with this expectation, they do not always use this approach to enable pupils to make better progress.
- Leaders have identified that developing literacy skills is a lever for improvement. Teachers encourage pupils to regularly read each day and this is improving both pupils' enjoyment of reading and their comprehension skills. For those pupils who fall behind, interventions are in place and the school's evaluation indicates an improvement in pupils' competencies. However, it is not clear how these short-term gains are built upon in pupils' regular classes.
- The effectiveness of teachers' use of assessment is inconsistent. Where teachers clearly identify what pupils need to do next, pupils respond well. For example, effective practice in English results in pupils writing in a more sophisticated way to analyse the writer's intent and the use of context. However, teachers are not always sufficiently skilled in using assessment to inform pupils' learning in the longer term, so that they can confidently apply skills independently. Misconceptions are not consistently rectified

and consequently the progress that pupils make is limited.

- Teachers do not always adapt tasks and activities well enough to challenge the most able pupils. Pupils are often given tasks that are too limiting for them to be able to apply a higher level of skill. Often, pupils are not sure of the 'bigger picture' of their learning and how what they have been asked to do fits into a longer term context.
- There is much effective practice in the school, which provides a resource for leaders to share more widely. In subjects such as science and humanities, teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to develop pupils' understanding of subject vocabulary and concepts. Teachers use questioning well to check understanding and to expand pupils' thinking.
- The learning environment is typically conducive to learning. Where expectations are high, pupils are focused on their activities and conform accordingly. Any off-task behaviour or distraction is often the direct result of ineffective planning or low expectations. The majority of pupils who responded to the pupil survey said that behaviour in lessons is good. However, pupils are not sufficiently motivated or enthused by their learning so that they take greater responsibility and show initiative.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils can talk about how they are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and the dangers posed by alcohol and smoking. They know how to keep themselves safe when online or when using social media. Leaders place importance on pupils' emotional well-being and provide access to counsellors and other support when they need it.
- Pupils consider their personal beliefs and say they are encouraged to understand other cultures and treat everyone equally. However, they are less secure in discussing how they can protect themselves from people who might try to influence them with more extreme views.
- Pupils make effective choices when they leave at the end of Year 11. Pupils say that they have considered their 'preferred futures' and benefit from the annual careers fair and from visits to universities. Staff have used business contacts to mentor pupils and to provide an insight into different vocations. However, some pupils would appreciate further advice about how to choose their GCSE options.
- Pupils respond well to opportunities to take on responsibilities. They are keen to talk about what they are doing and how this has helped them to develop their skills. However, some pupils are ambivalent about their experiences of school. The responses received through the survey issued during the inspection support the inconsistency of their experience of learning.
- Some parents expressed their concerns about the prevalence of bullying at the school. School records and the testimony of pupils show that pupils do not consider bullying to be a particular problem at the school. Pupils can identify the difference between bullying and pupils 'falling out'. However, some pupils say that when they report issues, they are not always aware whether action has been taken. They are therefore less

confident that there will be a speedy resolution to their concerns.

- A small number of pupils use alternative providers. Leaders ensure that they are aware of how pupils' needs are being met and the progress that they make through regular visits and reports.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have made changes to the way in which behavioural expectations are managed. There are clear expectations and a strategic overview maintained of incidents so that preventative actions can be taken. Staff training has been effective in supporting teachers to manage incidents to achieve a positive resolution. As a result, pupils say that behaviour has improved, and this is reflected in the reduction of fixed-term and internal exclusions.
- A significant minority of parents who responded to Parent View have concerns about the school's ability to manage behavioural issues. However, the relationships observed during the inspection between pupils and teachers were polite and respectful.
- The actions taken by leaders have improved rates of attendance, so it is now in line with national averages. Similarly, persistent absence has reduced and is also in line with national figures. There are still some disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND with persistently low attendance. Leaders know these pupils and their circumstances and recognise the need to work more effectively with such pupils and their families to ensure more regular attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Work in pupils' books and learning observed by inspectors, as well as the information provided by school leaders, show that the progress that pupils make is not consistent. Over the last two years, pupils' progress by the end of Year 11 has been significantly below the national average. Attainment also remains below the national average, including in English and mathematics.
- Many groups of pupils do not make sufficiently good progress. The most able pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are not presented with enough challenge to reach the highest standards. In many subjects, boys do not achieve as well as girls.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND do not make good progress because the support they receive is not targeted well enough. Where teaching is effective, pupils make better progress, and this is illustrated in the improvements in science, humanities, modern foreign languages and mathematics in 2018 for disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders are aware of those pupils who require additional support to improve their literacy skills. Planned interventions show improvements in reading and spelling in the short term.
- Leaders use assessment information regularly to analyse outcomes and identify pupils who fall behind. They are aware of the pupils who need to catch up, but teachers do

not always adapt their planning or refine their pedagogy so that they do so.

- The changes made to subject leadership, combined with the improved teaching and learning in some areas of the curriculum, have led to better performance at key stage 4 in humanities, modern foreign languages and science. The school's own information shows that Year 10 pupils are now making better progress than previously.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work and the improved assessment systems in place indicate that pupils in key stage 3 are making better progress than has been the case in the past. There is an improvement in what pupils know, understand and can do in a range of different subjects, which is preparing them well for the demands of key stage 4.

School details

Unique reference number	140416
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10081352

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 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	755
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Sheila Naylor
Headteacher	Rachael Bennett
Telephone number	01823 664201
Website	www.courtfields.net
Email address	sch.552@educ.somerset.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 November to 1 December 2016

Information about this school

- Court Fields School joined the Castle Partnership Trust in 2014. The trust consists of two secondary schools. Under the scheme of delegation, the trust is responsible for the standards that pupils reach at the school. The board of directors delegates some functions to the local governing body. Trust officers provide support for the school.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. There was a larger than average increase in the number of pupils between 2017 and 2018.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average.
- Most pupils are White British and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is higher than the national average. The number of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is lower than that seen nationally.

- A small number of pupils access alternative provision at REACH, an alternative education provider, and through the Taunton Deane Partnership College.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a range of subjects and age groups and scrutinised pupils' written work. Observations were conducted jointly with members of the leadership team.
- Meetings were held with members of the leadership team and representatives from the governing body. In addition, inspectors met with curriculum and pastoral leaders. The lead inspector met with the chief executive of the Castle Partnership Academy Trust. A phone call was made to the designated officer and to the local authority.
- Inspectors met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their experience of school.
- Inspectors looked at the school's documentation, including the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and priorities for future improvement. Inspectors reviewed progress, behaviour and attendance information relating to current pupils, and governors' records.
- School policies relating to safeguarding, pupils' behaviour, the use of additional funding, including the pupil premium, and the curriculum were scrutinised.
- Inspectors considered the 133 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 41 free-text responses, 59 responses to the staff questionnaire and 88 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Sarah McGinnis, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Paul Winterton	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Baker	Ofsted Inspector
Carol Hannaford	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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