

Inspection of Set Saxmundham School

Seaman Avenue, Saxmundham, Suffolk IP17 1DZ

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 January 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have experienced lots of disruption at the school since the previous inspection. Among other challenges, pupils have experienced many changes in teaching staff. This has led to declining standards of education and behaviour and has negatively affected pupils' experiences over time.

Many pupils get frustrated by the low standard of education they receive. Pupils want to do well in school but are not receiving the right support and provision needed to reach their high aspirations. This includes enrichment activities, which vary in quality.

Pupils' behaviour, although now improving, is still of concern to some pupils and parents. Leaders have ensured that the school is now calm and orderly during lessons and breaktimes. Since the beginning of the academic year, the incidents of unacceptable behaviour have reduced. Staff ensure that pupils are safe in school.

Pupils say that bullying was once a problem at the school, but staff now deal with it well when it happens. Leaders have improved the way pupils report their worries to staff. Pupils are gaining confidence in the new pastoral support team and the school nurse. Many pupils value the relationships they build with other pupils and staff. Some pupils described the school as a caring family.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have lots of ideas about what they want pupils to learn. However, leaders have not finished setting these out clearly, and putting them in place. This means that teachers do not know what specifically needs to be taught in some subjects. This has been made worse by the high number of changes to teaching staff. As a result, teachers do not teach pupils what they need to know to be successful in these subjects. Pupils do not understand or remember a lot of what they are trying to learn. This leads to some pupils becoming disinterested and their learning slows. However, leaders have prioritised the development of reading for those who need help to catch up. Pupils who find reading hard receive suitable support and their reading improves.

Too often teachers do not check what pupils have remembered and understood. Teachers do not identify what pupils are finding too easy or too hard. As a result, teachers have not put in place learning activities that will help to improve pupils' learning.

Leaders have not ensured that all staff provide appropriate support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff cater for pupils in the school's specialist SEND provision well. Parents of these pupils reported positive experiences for their children. Leaders have not provided teachers with effective guidance on how to help pupils with SEND elsewhere in school. As a result, too many pupils with SEND are unable to access the curriculum effectively.

Leaders have not made personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education a high enough priority in the curriculum. Teachers have not taught pupils about the personal characteristics protected by law from discrimination such as race, gender, gender reassignment and sexual orientation. Leaders have provided few opportunities for pupils to learn about fundamental British values or the issues they face as citizens in contemporary Britain. Pupils told us they find it hard to learn in PSHE. This is reflected in pupils' understanding of the subject. New leaders have recently started to redesign the curriculum in PSHE. This is not yet complete.

Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced substantial challenges. Trustees have not acted quickly enough to ensure that leaders take the necessary actions to settle and improve the school. Trustees have not carried out well enough their duty of holding leaders to account for the school's effectiveness. Trustees have introduced a committee focused on the school's improvement and have sought the help of external experts. Since the appointment of the chief executive officer (CEO), newer leaders are being held more clearly to account. The work of these newer leaders is having some positive effect in areas such as behaviour and reading. However, there are still significant weaknesses at the school. Although some pupils report positive changes, many parents and pupils remain frustrated and hold negative views of the school.

Leaders report that staff vacancies have made staff workload difficult to manage. At times, staff training is interrupted or reduced in quality due to the other priorities. However, staff work with positive attitudes and are determined to make the necessary improvements to the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Trustees have provided the necessary challenge so that leaders have improved the way staff support pupils when concerns arise. Leaders have ensured that staff teach pupils clearly what to do if they do not feel safe.

All staff and trainees have up-to-date training in safeguarding. Staff know the signs of harm and neglect and how to respond when necessary. Staff work together and with external agencies to try to reduce risks that pupils face at school and in the community. Leaders' records are well organised and outline clearly how different agencies should help vulnerable pupils. Leaders ensure that pupils receive the support they need.

Leaders ensure that all adults at the school are checked for their suitability to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Trustees have not provided the necessary challenge to leaders about the quality of their work. Because of this, falling standards were not identified quickly enough to halt the decline. Trustees must ensure that leaders can demonstrate, with clear evidence, the effectiveness of their actions. This will ensure that trustees can swiftly identify what is going well and what needs improvement, and challenge leaders as necessary.
- In several subjects, leaders have not finished setting out their expectations for what pupils should learn. Where this is the case, teachers have not ensured that pupils successfully build on previous learning. Leaders must complete their work to establish coherent programmes of learning in each subject. Leaders should then provide teachers with the training and guidance to teach these subjects well.
- Leaders have not prepared teachers with the necessary training or information to teach pupils with SEND effectively. As a result, these pupils have not learned the curriculum as well as they could. Leaders must provide training and information so that teachers understand the needs of all pupils with SEND and how best to meet their needs.
- Leaders have not ensured that teachers check how well pupils remember what they have been taught. This means that teachers do not know when pupils need to revisit important information. Leaders must ensure that teachers check what pupils remember and use this information to improve pupils' learning.
- Leaders have not included protected characteristics within the curriculum and provision for personal development. Pupils have not yet learned about important aspects of fundamental British values or the diverse lifestyles in society today. Leaders must ensure that the curriculum and provision for personal development prepare pupils sufficiently for life in modern Britain.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	138273
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10217459
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	262
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	James Wellesley Wesley
Headteacher	Christina Watson
Website	www.saxmundhamschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has specialist provision for pupils with SEND. The provision has places for 18 pupils with cognition and learning needs, and 18 places for pupils with communication and interaction needs.
- The school uses the services of an alternative provision.
- Since the start of 2020, 133 pupils have left the school at times other than at the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspection was carried out following a number of complaints made to Ofsted that raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether safeguarding was effectively managed by leaders at the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with trustees, trust leaders, the CEO, the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, the assistant special educational needs coordinator, teachers, and members of support staff.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in English, mathematics, science and drama. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Due to the impact of COVID-19, inspectors were only able to visit one lesson in drama.
- Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at curriculum plans and samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- Inspectors held discussions with the designated safeguarding lead, the assistant designated safeguarding lead, members of staff and pupils regarding the way the school manages the safeguarding of pupils. Inspectors also looked at the school's safeguarding and child protection records.
- During the inspection, both specialist units were not open due to COVID-19. An inspector looked at the school's records regarding the units and spoke with leaders and parents of pupils who attend the specialist units.

Inspection team

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