

Samuel Ryder Academy

Drakes Drive, St Albans AL1 5AR

Inspection dates	17–18 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, supported by a highly effective leadership team, has driven improvements in all aspects of the school's work.
- Pupils achieve well in all parts of the school as a result of effective teaching.
- Leaders have managed change exceptionally well, as the school has grown and faced the challenges of providing effective education for pupils across a broad age range.
- Pupils value the sense of community within the school and feel safe.
- Children in the early years benefit from a good start. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school and learn well.
- Behaviour around school and in lessons is good. Pupils socialise well and are proud of their school.
- Governors provide high-quality support and challenge for school leaders. They have a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and where it needs to develop further.
- Courses are well matched to the needs of students in 16 to 19 study programmes. As a result, they make good progress and achieve well.
- The attainment gaps in English and mathematics between disadvantaged pupils and others have closed in almost all year groups.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils, and especially boys, in key stages 3 and 4 do not consistently present their work with sufficient care and pride.
- The best practice in teaching between the primary and secondary phases of the school have recently begun to be shared effectively. At this stage, it is too early to see the full impact of much of this work.
- Attendance rates and levels of persistent absence are in line with national figures.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standard of handwriting and presentation in key stages 3 and 4, especially for boys.
- Share best practice between the primary and secondary parts of the school so that all teachers can benefit from the elements of outstanding teaching that currently exist.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher and his senior colleagues have provided exceptionally effective leadership to transform a school at risk of failing into a good school in a short period of time. This work was under way at the time of the last inspection but it has evolved much more rapidly in the last two years, as a culture of success and aspiration has been embedded in staff, pupils and the parent community.
- An utterly focused emphasis on improving teaching has paid off. Teachers are now engaged and excited about improving their own teaching as well as that of others. In this environment, open and straightforward discussions between teachers and leaders about how to improve are happening.
- Systems to check on the quality of teaching are well established. Leaders gather evidence about the impact of teaching from several sources and combine all the information to provide a profile of each teacher. This then informs any areas of specific support that individual teachers may need. It also picks out any trends or patterns that may be emerging across the school.
- The school's professional development programme, fuelled by the monitoring of teaching, is lively and highly valued by teaching staff. They appreciate the opportunities to work with colleagues from other schools and external consultants in order to improve their own practice. Leaders have been inundated with requests from teachers wishing to share good practice with their colleagues. The culture of continuous improvement and sharing best practice has been successful when used between the primary and secondary phases. This aspect of the schools' work, almost unique to its context, is in need of further development.
- Leaders manage the performance of teachers through an appraisal system that sits alongside that of monitoring the quality of teaching. Targets set for and by teachers are ambitious and many have been achieved, contributing to the rise in overall achievement.
- The school's work to promote British values is effective and is woven into the wider curriculum. All age ranges benefit from visits and visitors, residential and day trips, and artistic or academic speakers. This, alongside a structured personal, social, health and economic education programme also supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school's work to support and promote the achievement of disadvantaged pupils is very effective. The additional funding is well targeted at interventions. Leaders' monitoring of the value for money that these provide is rigorous. Additional funding for the physical education and sport premium is equally well deployed; sports' participation is rising and the number and range of school teams are increasing.
- The leadership of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is very effective. Pupils are provided with appropriate support and teachers are well prepared for individual pupils' needs. This attention to detail enables this group of pupils to be a part of, and contribute to, the whole school community.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Of the 123 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, very few were negative and 94% of parents would recommend the school to another parent. In addition to the questionnaire, 108 parents provided comments about the school. These were universally positive and many parents took the opportunity to shower praise on the school, its ethos, its leaders and its teaching staff.
- The curriculum is broad and follows the recent revisions to the national curriculum in key stages 1, 2 and 3. The range of GCSE courses on offer are wide, especially given the very small number of pupils who have been, and still are, in key stage 4. Leaders have provided pupils with options and have determinedly sought to provide them with the courses that they wish to take. This has sometimes meant that very small numbers of pupils take a subject to GCSE level. The curriculum in key stages 1 and 2 is augmented by a creative theme that provides pupils with opportunities to develop important skills of art, music and writing.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is well informed about all aspects of the school's work
 - holds leaders to account for their performance
 - provides challenge and contributes significantly to the high aspirations among leaders and staff
 - ensures that governors visit the school to experience its work first-hand

- checks that health and safety requirements are met
- maintains a very clear understanding and strategic overview of the school's finances
- is focused on its strategic, and not operational, functions.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Systems and procedures, including those for checking the suitability of new staff to work with children, meet requirements. Child protection training for staff is up to date. The most vulnerable pupils' needs are well known to staff. The school's support for these pupils is very effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has improved since the past inspection. It is now consistently good and in some parts of the school it is outstanding.
- Teaching is based on good relationships between staff and pupils across all age ranges. The positive learning environment means that the overwhelming majority of lessons are calm and productive. Pupils respond quickly to teachers' instructions and requests, and many say that they enjoy coming to school because of the teachers.
- Assessment has developed well in the recent past. The school has adopted revised assessment strategies for both primary and secondary phases, which enable teachers and leaders to precisely monitor the progress that individuals and groups of pupils are making. The assessments that teachers make are moderated within the school and also by teachers in other schools.
- A focus on the quality of feedback that pupils receive has been effective in ensuring that pupils receive regular and supportive guidance about how to improve in all subjects. The school's policy includes pupils responding to their feedback and demonstrating that they have understood what the teacher has asked them to focus on. Many pupils do this and commented that it helps them to keep on learning.
- Lessons are planned effectively and teachers are confident enough to be creative and enliven lessons. A primary strategy, involving pupils talking in a very focused way about what they are studying before writing about it, has been adopted by secondary teachers. Instances of this at work were observed during the inspection and the written outcomes, for Year 8 pupils in English lessons, were of a high standard.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and readily make contributions in lessons. They ask questions if they are unsure about how to proceed or what is expected of them.
- The extent to which pupils rely on instruction from teachers is diminishing because staff have been encouraging them to use their own initiative more and develop important independent learning skills.
- Pupils value the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities that the school offers. There is a range of activities that include sporting and non-sporting choices. The uptake for these clubs and activities is high and growing.
- Pupils feel confident that their views are listened to. They do not always agree with school rules. Some told inspectors that they do not like the 'tied-back hair rule' but that they accept the reasons for it. In the main, pupils found it difficult to identify how the school could support them further.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Conduct around the school has improved significantly over time. There is now little disruption to lessons and where this does occur it is dealt with swiftly, through a staged behaviour policy that provides pupils with support to change their behaviours. Pupils understand the policy and say that it helps to keep the school a positive place.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They look after the site well and little litter is dropped. In the dining room and library, secondary pupils gather to chat and socialise in a calm and orderly manner. When lessons restart, pupils of all ages move around the school quickly and sensibly. They are polite and welcoming. Many displayed very good manners, holding doors open for one another and greeting staff politely as they passed them in corridors.

- Pupils' attendance is in line with national figures for all age ranges. The levels of persistent absence have risen recently. Staff are well informed about the pupils involved and have already raised the levels of attendance for some of them.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils currently in key stages 1 and 2 are making good progress from their starting points. The proportion of pupils who had met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was above the national average in 2015. Pupils currently in Year 1 are on track to sustain this positive picture.
- In 2015, standards in reading, writing and mathematics were above average at the end of Year 2. The work of these pupils, now in Year 3, indicates that these standards have been sustained. Some of the writing in Year 3, by most-able pupils, is of a very high standard. Pupils currently in Year 2 are working in line with age-related expectations. Thresholds for the revised national tests that these pupils are undertaking have not yet been released.
- In the past, pupils have entered Year 7 with standards of reading, writing and mathematics that are below national levels. Pupils currently in Year 11, for example, were well below the national average when they joined the school. The picture has changed and pupils in Year 7 at the moment left primary school with standards that were in line with the national level.
- The proportion of pupils gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics at GCSE level in 2015 were above the national level. This was also the case in 2014. From much lower starting points, the current Year 11 pupils are on track to achieve a slightly lower proportion than the recent national level. If achieved, however, this will represent very good progress for this year group.
- Achievement across a range of subjects has been inconsistent in previous years. Some subjects, such as science, art, French and English have achieved at or above the national level. In other subjects, including geography, history and drama, pass rates have been below the national level. The school's assessment data, moderated externally and checked by inspectors, indicates that the subjects that have underperformed in the past have improved considerably and are on track to at least match national levels this year.
- The proportion of pupils making or exceeding expected progress in English in 2015 was well above the national level and is on track to be similarly positive this year. In mathematics, pupils' progress was in line with national figures for this measure but this is set to improve for the current Year 11 pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well. There was minimal difference between the attainment of this group of pupils and others in 2015. This marked a significant improvement over time. Current predictions indicate that the differences in GCSE outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and others in Year 11 will be minimal in 2016.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress. Careful tracking of the progress of this group means that interventions and support programmes are evaluated for their effectiveness regularly. Where these are effective, they are increased or sustained; where they have not had an impact on progress, they are removed and replaced with alternatives. Parents of pupils who have special educational needs or disability are positive about the support that their children receive.
- Most-able pupils have been increasingly challenged since the previous inspection. The result of this is apparent in current assessment information, which indicates that very high proportions of those pupils identified as being most able at the end of key stage 2 are on track to achieve the higher grades or A*, A or B at GCSE level.
- A scrutiny of pupils' work across the curriculum identified some real strength. The standard of art work, for example, across the school is especially high. Specialist teaching in the primary phase is producing some very good results, many of which are displayed attractively around the school corridors. In the secondary phase, the standard is also very high. Pupils' work in portfolios is very carefully produced and frequently exhibits pride and attention to detail. Pupils' work in science is also very good. Here, most-able pupils are being challenged to understand and then explain some challenging concepts. Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy this level of challenge within their lessons.
- The pride and care that are present in pupils' art work are not consistent. Pupils' handwriting and presentation, especially for boys and particularly in Key Stage 3, are not good enough. School leaders found it easy to identify the gender of a pupil by looking at the quality of the presentation. In some classes, teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation and the work is neat and well produced.

- Pupils receive useful and supportive information, advice and guidance about their future choices when they leave school. This process begins in key stage 3 and involves work experience in key stage 4. Pupils told inspectors that they understand the choices and options in front of them.

Early years provision

is good

- Children join the Reception class with a range of skills and knowledge. In the main, these are broadly in line with those typically expected of children their age. They make good progress and, in 2014 and 2015, the proportion gaining a good level of development was above the national level. Children currently in the Reception class have also made good progress, although their starting points were slightly lower than in previous years. The proportion on track to gain a good level of development is a little above the national level in 2015.
- Leaders have managed changes in staffing very well. Three members of the early years team have left the school recently and a temporary teacher has been in place in one of the Reception classes. The potential disruption that this could have caused has been limited by good teamwork among teachers and learning support assistants. Assessments of children have been overseen by the permanent teacher to ensure that progress is sustained. High-quality support from learning support assistants has contributed considerably to the good quality of teaching that is occurring in this part of the school.
- The learning environment is well resourced, bright and welcoming. Children are confident and know where they can find equipment and resources to support their learning and play. The school has made good use of the limited available outside space, and children enjoy learning in this area.
- An effective approach to transition supports children joining the school as they enter the Reception class and there is an equally supportive handover to Year 1. Children are well prepared for their next steps because teachers share information about children's learning and personal development in addition to providing them with opportunities to spend time in their next class.
- Parents are well informed about their children's progress. Communications between school and home are good and parents are very positive about the overall experience that the school provides.

16 to 19 study programmes

is good

- The school works in partnership with other local schools in a consortium arrangement, which enables them to offer a broad range of options for students entering the sixth form.
- Numbers of students in the sixth form are currently very low but are set to rise. The numbers studying individual subjects are accordingly low. Retention rates are above the national average.
- The progress that students make in the sixth form is consistently good. All those who applied for a university place in 2015 were successful.
- The sixth form is highly inclusive. Students' starting points are wide-ranging and some enter with low levels of English and mathematics. These students receive good support to gain these key qualifications while studying in the sixth form.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Teachers are confident and have good subject knowledge. They are encouraging independent learning skills and sixth-form students are increasingly adopting a self-driven approach to their work.
- Vocational courses are offered alongside a range of academic subjects. Success rates in these courses are high. The school's media work, for example, supported by its own television studio, is particularly successful.
- All students are provided with work experience, which is relevant to their ambitions. Students told inspectors that this helps to confirm or question the routes that they are taking. Advice and guidance are good. Students feel well prepared for their next steps.

School details

Unique reference number	138582
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10002543

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	792
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	65
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Sidders
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Matthew Gauthier
Telephone number	01727 859382
Website	www.samuelryderacademy.co.uk
Email address	admin@samuelryderacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 April–1 May 2014

Information about this school

- The number of pupils in the secondary phase of the school is currently below the national average. The school is building larger year groups in key stage 3, which will filter through to key stage 4 in the next two years: at this stage, given current numbers, this part of the school will be slightly larger than most secondary schools.
- There are two classes in each year of the primary phase. At present there are only pupils in the early years, and Years 1, 2 and 3. When all year groups are populated in the primary phase, this part of the school will be larger than an average primary school.
- The school is part of the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups or pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support from the pupil premium is average. This additional government funding is for children looked after and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average.
- The school met the government's current floor targets in 2015 for primary and secondary pupils. These express the minimum expectations for what pupils should achieve by the end of their time in the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons and visited smaller groups of pupils in additional sessions. In all lessons, they evaluated the quality of pupils' work over time.
- Inspectors met with pupils formally and informally.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. There were also meetings with the chief executive officer of the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust.
- There were 123 responses to Parent View for inspectors to view. Inspectors also spoke with parents at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors reviewed records provided by the school, including information about pupils' progress, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and documents relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Chris Moodie, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Joanna Jones	Ofsted Inspector
Paula Masters	Ofsted Inspector
Sally Nutman	Ofsted Inspector

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