

Sir William Ramsay School

Rose Avenue, Hazlemere, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP15 7UB

Inspection dates

22–23 June 2016

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders' work to improve the school has not been incisive enough to secure consistently good teaching and achievement.
- Over time governors have not had the insight necessary to hold leaders firmly to account.
- Assessment information is inaccurate. Teachers and leaders do not have a sound enough understanding of how well pupils and groups of pupils are achieving.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not routinely make the good progress necessary to make up the gaps between their achievement and that of their peers.
- Boys' progress is too variable. Boys with lower starting points are the worst affected.
- Some teachers do not plan and teach lessons that enable pupils of differing abilities to learn equally well.
- Teachers' expectations are not uniformly high enough for all pupils.
- The usefulness of homework is variable. It is not consistently supporting learning in class or stretching pupils, and in particular the most able, to learn more.
- Leadership of the sixth form has not been sharp. Not enough has been done to reduce the notable proportion of students who leave during the year.
- Students' progress in the sixth form is too inconsistent. In Year 12 in particular, a considerable number of students are not doing well enough.
- Leaders have not made sure that work experience in the sixth form routinely provides a valuable experience for students on vocational courses.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils typically behave well in lessons and around the school. They feel safe and value the support provided by pastoral staff.
- Pupils learn to keep themselves safe online and in the wider world. Bullying is uncommon and dealt with effectively.
- Leaders have worked effectively to promote equality and tackle prejudice. Pupils are tolerant and accepting of difference.
- Pupils with hearing impairment and physical disability receive high-quality support in the school's additional resource provisions.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better and promotes strong progress by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations for the achievement of all pupils
 - all teachers plan and teach lessons that engage pupils' interest and provide suitable challenge for pupils of varying abilities, and particularly for lower-ability boys
 - homework effectively supports pupils' learning in all subjects and consistently provides suitable challenge for pupils of varying abilities and in particular the most-able
 - teachers' assessment of pupils' achievement in each subject is accurate, particularly at key stage 3.

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - work to raise achievement is informed by an accurate understanding of the progress of each group of pupils in each subject
 - leaders define the precise starting points for work to improve teaching and the exact improvements this will bring in pupils' achievement by key points in time, so that leaders and governors can evaluate the impact of their actions and adjust their approach when needed
 - governors hold leaders more tightly to account for the quality of teaching and achievement, acting as appropriate on recommendations from the forthcoming external review.

- Improve the sixth form by ensuring that:
 - students joining the sixth form choose and study qualifications that suit their needs and aspirations right from the start, so that they remain engaged, complete their courses and achieve well
 - students on vocational courses routinely experience external work experience that contributes well to the qualification they are studying and supports their progression into employment and further study.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

requires improvement

- Over time leadership has not been routinely sharp enough to secure consistently good teaching and achievement. Leadership of the sixth form has been weak.
- School improvement priorities are mainly focused on the right areas. However, typically, leaders do not analyse performance information well enough to gain an exact understanding of the starting point for their work or identify the precise impact on teaching and pupils' achievement that must result from their actions.
- A few pressing priorities for improvement, such as the need to reduce proportions of students dropping out in the sixth form and improve assessment and achievement at key stage 3, are not identified in the school's self-evaluation or development plan.
- Staff turnover has had an impact on the quality of teaching. Leaders have worked to develop those teachers who are less skilled, for example by providing coaching and suggestions for improvement. However, this has not resulted in consistently strong teaching.
- Leaders check the quality of teaching through visiting lessons and reviewing pupils' work. The electronic system they use to analyse the information they collect from observations of lessons indicates that a notable proportion of lessons, about one in every four or five, does not meet their expectations. However, leaders evaluate teaching overall as good. They have not considered well enough the impact this variable quality of teaching has on pupils' achievement.
- Leaders have not paid enough attention to the quality of assessment and pupils' achievement in different subjects at key stage 3. As a result, they had not recognised that their assessment does not provide accurate information about pupils' achievement. Work seen in pupils' books and lessons during the inspection indicates that achievement in key stage 3, although variable, is stronger than the school's assessment information indicates.
- Leaders have recognised that too little was being done to ensure that pupil premium funding was spent effectively. A well-considered, comprehensive plan is in process to tighten the use of the funding, establish the exact quality of current provision for disadvantaged pupils and areas for attention. However, it is too early to see the impact of this work on the achievement of disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders are working effectively to reduce the incidence of fixed-term exclusion. Incidence of this type of exclusion has dropped over the last three years. The relatively recent introduction of internal exclusion in the 'zone', where pupils who have behaved poorly are required to study in silence, is leading to a further drop in external exclusion. The proportion of pupils being sent to the 'zone' a second time is also reducing.
- Leaders have improved their approach to tackling poor attendance, contacting parents more quickly when needed and also sometimes making home visits.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils study the full range of national curriculum subjects at key stage 3 and are provided with suitable opportunities for academic and vocational study at key stage 4. All pupils are required to study at least one arts subject at that stage. However, due to variability in teaching the impact of the curriculum on pupils' progress across subjects is not consistently effective.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural development and preparation for life in modern Britain is supported well. Philosophy and ethics lessons and assemblies help pupils learn about different faiths. Tutor time includes time for reflection and discussion. For example, during the inspection, pupils were seen engaged in robust debates about the pros and cons of 'Brexit'. Work such as that with Stonewall and the 'Show Racism the Red Card' campaign have helped develop pupils' understanding of equalities. Pupils benefit from a range of activities beyond lessons, including sports clubs and arts events.
- The leadership of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability is effective. Pupils with hearing impairment or physical disability benefit from the nurturing environment of the school's additional resource provisions. Pupils and their parents are increasingly involved in decisions about their education and next steps beyond school. Arrangements with health services ensure regular physical or speech and language therapy. School support staff receive specialist training so that they can ensure that pupils continue their therapies in between health professional visits.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is improving. The governors have increasingly recognised that they have not been effective enough in holding the school to account for the quality of teaching and achievement. Their

work has undergone considerable development this year. New governors have brought in useful experience from the worlds of education, business and law. An external review has been arranged to help them improve further.

- Governors have, nevertheless, been hampered in their work because leaders have not provided them with sharp analysis of teaching and achievement. Reports from senior staff about the school's performance are not consistently backed up by appropriate evidence.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Records are detailed and of high quality, and the school works well with other agencies when needed to ensure that any pupil at risk is protected and supported. Leaders have improved internal support for vulnerable pupils, making sure that a clear plan is in place, agreed and shared with the pupil, parent and appropriate staff. Checks on the identity and suitability of staff are robust, well managed and recorded. Staff and governors receive regular suitable training, including on how to protect pupils from risk of radicalisation. All staff are fully aware of their responsibilities and who to report any concerns to. Governors make sure that regular thorough checks are carried out on the school's work to keep pupils safe, so they can be sure it is sound.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- Teaching quality is too variable. Some teachers do not demonstrate the skills necessary to plan and teach lessons that engage pupils' interest and provide different levels of challenge for pupils of varying abilities.
- Teachers' expectations are not routinely high. Some teachers allow pupils to give up when stuck, rather than helping them to succeed.
- Assessment at key stage 3 is not effective. Over time, teachers have assessed pupils' achievement by identifying the overall level that best fits with their work for the half term. However, typically, pupils have only had the opportunity to cover some of the learning required for that level at any given assessment point. This approach does not provide teachers and pupils with a sharp understanding of the skills and knowledge grasped and what is still to be learned. Furthermore, in most cases, teachers use levels that have not been adapted to assess how well pupils are gaining skills and knowledge required in preparation for the new GCSEs. As a result, the level awarded can be misleading and indicate that pupils are making better progress than they actually are.
- Pupils and parents comment on considerable inconsistency in the setting and expectation for homework. The amount and level of challenge differs markedly between teachers and subjects. Too often homework just involves finishing off work started in class. Pupils who have already finished do not get any.
- Where teaching is stronger, pupils are highly engaged. Teachers explain concepts well and make good use of questioning to check pupils' understanding and help them deepen their learning. Expectations are high and pupils make strong progress.
- Some valuable support sessions are available for pupils who need to catch up. For example, some pupils in Year 7 have benefited from the introduction of effective reading sessions, which have helped them to improve quickly.

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 feel safe and well cared for. They know where to go to for support and are confident that staff will work with them to resolve any issues that occur.
- Pupils learn to keep themselves safe online and in the wider world. Assemblies and personal health and social education lessons help pupils learn about such things as dealing with loss, cyber bullying, hygiene, healthy diet and the danger of alcohol and drugs.
- Pupils have a good understanding of issues of equality and discrimination. Homophobia and racism are not tolerated. Pupils say that prejudiced name-calling is uncommon and bullying is rare. When it does happen, staff tackle it well.
- Pupils typically value the support they receive about options, choices and guidance on careers, including learning about the range of opportunities available to them beyond school after Year 11. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability, together with their parents, are supported to visit colleges to find out what will suit them best.

- Leaders make sure that the small number of pupils attending alternative provision are kept safe and supported to attend well and make progress.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school site. They arrive punctually, equipped and ready to learn. Low-level disruption in lessons is quite rare.
- The atmosphere in the school is calm and orderly. Pupils are polite and respectful to adults and one another. Pupils said that there are occasionally incidents of poorer behaviour at lunchtime, but this is dealt with well by staff.
- Attendance has improved over the last three years and is now above the national figure. The proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, with low attendance also improved notably in that time. Low attendance for some disadvantaged pupils remains a concern. However, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils in key stage 3 with low attendance had fallen again this year due to the improved support and better transition arrangements with primary schools.
- On the rare occasions that pupils behave poorly, they spend time in the recently established internal exclusion room, where they continue their schoolwork and can receive support. As a result, external exclusions are fewer and pupils' learning is less disrupted.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- As a result of variations in teaching quality, pupils do not make consistently good progress. Progress differs between groups of pupils and subjects.
- In 2015 pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 was in line with the national figure. However, the average progress of pupils with low starting points was below the national average for that group, whereas in 2014 it had been high. Progress of lower-attaining pupils in the school in English, mathematics and other subjects continues to be too variable.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not consistently make the strong progress necessary to catch up with their peers. Gaps between these pupils and other pupils in the school and nationally are not narrowing sufficiently. In some instances, they are widening. In 2015, the average progress these pupils made across their subjects by the end of key stage 4 was low, whereas in 2014 it was in line with the national figure. Disadvantaged pupils currently in the school make the same varied progress as their peers.
- Boys' achievement in English and mathematics is not consistently good. They make variable progress dependent on the quality of teaching. Over time, boys' achievement has been in line with the national figure by the end of key stage 4. However, school assessment information indicates that boys are on track to make notably less progress in English and mathematics by the end of key stage 4 this year than last.
- School assessment information indicates that the proportion of pupils on track to meet their targets in key stage 3 is extremely variable. However, the inaccuracy of this information makes it unreliable.
- Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported by well-trained specialist teachers and support staff. Individual teaching and support help them catch up when they are behind. The nurturing environment of the additional resource provisions supports pupils' wider development and enables them to engage as fully as possible in mainstream lessons. However, assessment information indicates that mostly these pupils are not making good progress. Evidence gathered during the inspection suggests that these pupils make variable progress dependent on the teaching they experience.
- The most able pupils typically benefit from effective teaching in top sets. However, their progress in options subjects varies. School assessment information shows that all are making good progress in GCSE English and mathematics, but their average progress across all their courses is lower than for other pupils. Most-able pupils are on track to attain an average of grade B across their subjects, indicating that they are typically making reasonable rather than good progress from their starting points.
- Over time, pupils of Pakistani origin have made good progress. In 2015 by the end of key stage 4 these pupils had on average achieved better than their peers and pupils from the same background nationally. School assessment information indicates that in Years 10 and 11 these pupils are set to achieve equally well.

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- Leadership of the sixth has not been sharp enough to ensure that all aspects of the 16 to 19 study programmes are delivered effectively. Students' achievement is too variable, and declining. Aspects of the provision are not well enough developed.
- Leaders and governors have focused more on increasing the proportion of Year 11 pupils in the sixth form than on ensuring that students stay once they have joined. The proportion of students leaving before they complete their courses was higher than the national figure in 2014 and has not reduced notably since. Leaders have not done enough to tackle this.
- Teaching in the sixth form contains the same variabilities as in the rest of the school. As a result, students' progress is not consistently good.
- In 2015, students' achievement in academic qualifications was, on average, higher than the national figure. However, boys' progress and the progress of pupils on vocational courses was just average. School assessment information indicates that that considerably smaller proportions of Year 13 students are set to meet or exceed their targets this summer than at the same time last year. Furthermore, notable proportions of students are not making good progress in one or more of the subjects they study, particularly in Year 12.
- Leaders have made sure that students who join the sixth form without a grade C or above in mathematics or English study the subject in Year 12. This is helpful. Nevertheless, this year, only one in four of the students who retook one or both of their GCSE examinations in Year 12 improved by a whole grade.
- Courses offered in the sixth form provide a suitable range of academic and vocational opportunities at level 3, the higher level of study. However, options to study at level 2 are limited to two choices which require students to study a fixed combination of two separate vocational courses, rather than a programme tailored to their interests and needs.
- Leaders make sure that students undertake external work experience at the end of Year 12. However, students studying vocational courses do not routinely have a placement that strongly enhances their skills and understanding of the work sector they are studying. Furthermore, leaders have not evaluated the impact of work experience on students' progress to identify any weaknesses that need tackling.
- When students are not studying for qualifications, they select one from a suitable range of enrichment options that support their broader development. Options include sports leadership, art, personal development and community service.
- At the end of Year 12 students take part in a 'future options week'. This offers specific advice on applying for apprenticeships, jobs and university. Students in Year 12, yet to experience this, were critical of the ongoing advice available about careers and options beyond school. Nevertheless, in 2015 all who left the sixth form at the end of their course who did not take a gap year progressed successfully to an apprenticeship or further or higher education.
- Assemblies, tutor time and workshops provide students with opportunities to explore issues such as sexual health, substance misuse, domestic violence, homophobia, racism, well-being and the risks of radicalisation. However, sixth formers' views on the impact of this were mixed.
- Attendance in the sixth form has improved notably over the last two years. Nevertheless, it is still not as high as it is in the rest of the school.
- Over the last year, better systems have been put in place for tracking the progress of students in the sixth form. This has enabled leaders to identify where any students need support to catch up. However, the information collected has not been used to analyse achievement in and across subjects and whether this is declining or improving.

School details

Unique reference number	137256
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10003181

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary modern (non-selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	998
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	172
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lisa Beukes
Headteacher	Mark Mayne
Telephone number	01494 815 211
Website	www.swr.bucks.sch.uk
Email address	office@swr.bucks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 July 2012

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized secondary school with a small sixth form. It converted to become an academy in August 2011.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The majority of pupils are from a White British background, with about a third from minority ethnic groups, most being of Pakistani heritage. An above-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who have additional special educational needs or disability is low.
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is high.
- The school operates two specialist units, called additional resource provisions. One unit has capacity for six hearing-impaired students. The second has nine places for pupils with physical disability.
- The school meets the current floor standard set by the government, which determines the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- Fifteen pupils attend alternative provision at Aspire, the county pupil referral unit. A few pupils spend time at the local children and adolescent mental health services provision (CAHMS) at Orchard House.
- The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Several leaders are relatively new to post. The head of sixth form took up her post this term.
- The headteacher is leaving the school at the end of term. The deputy headteacher will take on the role of acting headteacher from September 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 28 lessons, two of these jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also made four sets of shorter visits to lessons, visiting 15 lessons in total. In addition, inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work, including that of the most able and disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, pupils and sixth-form students. The lead inspector also met with members of the governing body, and spoke to one governor by telephone.
- Inspectors reviewed documents including safeguarding policies, behaviour and attendance records, self-evaluation and planning documents and the school's records on performance management and teaching and learning.
- Account was taken of 94 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, inspectors considered 64 parent responses by free text and letter. There were no responses to the electronic staff or pupil survey.

Inspection team

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