

Sandymoor

Wharford Lane, Sandymoor, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 1QU

Inspection dates

27–28 February 2018

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Pupils leave Sandymoor having significantly underachieved in many subjects. Current Year 11 pupils continue to underachieve considerably.
- Pupils in key stage 4 have considerable gaps in their learning as a result of historical poor teaching and inappropriate curriculum choices.
- The poorly planned curriculum has not allowed for pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. Leaders have since reviewed the curriculum.
- Leaders' actions are not having the desired effect on the achievement of those pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged.
- Assessment practices were found to be inaccurate. Leaders have taken actions to remedy this. However, it has hindered teachers in planning lessons that enable pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils do not think that the careers guidance that they have received has been good enough. They also think that the quality of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is not good. Inspection evidence supports this view.
- Although behaviour systems are embedded, the number of fixed-term exclusions are too high.
- Persistent absences are too high, especially in key stage 4 and for those pupils who are disadvantaged.
- Self-evaluation processes and plans for development do not reflect the actual quality of provision. Leaders do not sufficiently evaluate the key actions that will improve pupils' outcomes.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are taking action to address the weaknesses in the school's provision.
- Arrangements to keep pupils safe are effective.
- Leaders ensure the well-being of staff and promote work-life balance.
- Pupils at key stage 3 are making good progress in their learning.
- Sixth form provision is good. Students are taught well and they make good progress.

Full report

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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the school's assessment systems are fit for purpose and provide teachers with the accurate information that they need to plan learning that meets the pupils' needs.
- Quicken the pace of progress that pupils are making, especially at key stage 4 and for those pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Reduce the number of fixed-term exclusions and improve the attendance rates of those who are disadvantaged.
- Provide careers guidance and PSHE education that are of a high quality and are helpful to pupils in key stages 3 and 4.
- Use self-evaluation and improvement planning as a means to identify accurately the strengths and weaknesses of provision and check the difference the actions taken will make on improving pupils' outcomes.

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.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders are facing a legacy of weak teaching and poor curriculum choices. Although there have been many other challenges since the school opened, these are the core factors as to why pupils' achievement has been so poor. It is very clear that pupils currently in key stage 3 have a very different experience of school and that they are enjoying a better standard of education. This demonstrates the capacity within leadership to improve the school.
- Leaders know that there are weaknesses in the school's provision and are starting to take the necessary action. However, leaders have not clearly identified these actions in their self-evaluation or school improvement planning. Their actions have not improved pupils' outcomes quickly enough.
- Leaders have made a significant number of new appointments. For example, the whole of the science and mathematics departments are new. A number of senior and middle leaders are also new to post. This has brought a new energy and drive to remedy weaknesses, especially in teaching. While there is some impact to be seen, much more needs to be done to quicken the rates of progress that pupils make at key stage 4.
- Teachers are increasingly held to account for the quality of their teaching. They are provided with the necessary support and development to improve their practice. Leaders have established links with 24 schools to share good practice and ideas. Staff who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive. They particularly appreciate leaders' attentiveness to their well-being and work-life balance.
- Leaders have ensured that the additional funding received for pupil premium and special educational needs is used on different strategies and interventions. However, leaders have not routinely evaluated the impact of these actions on pupils' achievement. The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is not quick enough.
- The curriculum is currently being reviewed. Although the key stage 3 curriculum provides pupils with the opportunity to learn a range of subjects in a meaningful manner, the curriculum at key stage 4 had been badly planned. This has resulted in pupils not achieving as well as they should.
- Pupils are provided with a very wide range of enrichment activities. The uptake and attendance of these opportunities are high and they broaden the horizons and experiences of the pupils. The school is involved in a number of national and international information technology projects.
- Leaders provide careers guidance, citizenship and PSHE education across year groups. However, there is insufficient evaluation of the quality of this provision. Pupils told inspectors that they did not think the advice that they received and the quality of these areas were good enough. Inspection evidence confirms that this provision is tokenistic.

Governance of the school

- Governors act upon the information that they are given. However, the information that they have been given in the past about the progress that pupils make in all year groups has not always been inaccurate.
- Governors have been proactive in seeking external validation of the school's performance. The external advice that they have received has not always been correct. This has impeded the effectiveness of governors' work.
- Governors have had to overcome significant financial challenges and they have been working closely with the relevant agencies and bodies to ensure that the school's financial position is secured.
- Governors hold the principal to account in a supportive yet challenging way. Governors have had to deal with a number of personnel issues but have now secured a leadership team that has started to improve the quality of provision.
- Governors have a range of skills and expertise that allows them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They seek relevant training and are open to challenge.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Training, induction and recruitment processes are robust. Staff have a good understanding of how to keep children safe.
- Leaders keep very clear evidence of any referrals to statutory agencies and the actions that are to follow. The systems used for referrals are clear, quick and effective.
- Leaders are attentive in addressing the needs of vulnerable pupils and/or those who have specific needs at particular times. For example, the support provided for those dealing with bereavement or mental health issues is effective.
- Leaders have made sure that the necessary internet filters meet requirements and are effectively monitored.
- Leaders work closely with external agencies and act upon whatever support and advice that they are offered. Leaders involve parents and carers where appropriate.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Assessment practices have been inaccurate. It is only recently that they have been reviewed. This had led to erroneous information being reported to parents and confusing systems which have prevented teaching accurately meeting pupils' needs. This has also contributed to teaching and learning not being consistently strong across subjects and year groups. Leaders have acted to remedy the inaccuracies and this has led to teachers beginning to plan their lessons more appropriately to meet the needs of pupils.
- Teaching is strong at key stage 3. At key stage 4, while teaching is much improved, the gaps in learning are significant. As one pupil told inspectors: 'Our teachers cannot do anymore for us than they are doing now but we just have missed so much.' Pupils who

spoke to inspectors were very clear that teaching is much improved.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Nonetheless, at times, teachers do not address pupils' misunderstandings quickly enough. Too often, these misunderstandings are only addressed following an end of unit test.
- The relationship between teachers and pupils is good in the vast majority of lessons. The large number of new appointments to the teaching staff have already begun to make a difference to pupils' learning. Pupils told inspectors that more teachers are pushing them in their learning and making them work harder.
- Strengths in teaching are emerging. More teachers use their knowledge of what pupils already know and adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs. This explains why the progress made by some pupils is good in some subjects and year groups. It is not consistently so because not all teaching is strong. This is particularly the case for those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Leaders have not done enough to provide pupils with good careers education, information and guidance. Pupils in key stage 4 also feel that they did not receive accurate advice about their options and are now following unsuitable courses.
- Pupils feel safe at school and spoke confidently about how they keep themselves safe. Pupils who spoke to inspectors were eloquent in their discussion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender matters and issues that face young people today.
- Pupils are confident that bullying is dealt with effectively. Leaders maintain appropriate bullying logs and records.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to their learning. While pupils at key stage 3 are thriving, pupils at key stage 4 are aware of how much ground has been lost. Pupils are determined to work hard and are rising to their teachers' expectations of them.
- The small size of the schools allows for pupils to be known and valued. Pupils spoke warmly about their relationships with teachers and those spoken to comment that they feel adults in the school really care about them.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision benefit from the good-quality teaching and support that they receive. Their attendance rates are good. Leaders undertake routine communication with, and monitoring of, the three different providers.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Overall, attendance has improved and is similar to the national average. However, too many disadvantaged pupils are affected by low attendance, especially at key stage 4. This in turn is having a detrimental effect on their learning and progress.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are regularly absent in key stage 4 is high. At key stage 3 it is low. This reflects the differences seen in the quality of provision between key stage 3 and key stage 4 for these pupils.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions is too high. While behaviour during the inspection was positive, more than half the pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire did not think that behaviour is good.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- The achievement of pupils in 2016 and 2017 was among the worst nationally. Pupils have left Sandymoor having significantly underachieved in many subjects.
- The progress and quality of learning in the current Year 11 show considerable underachievement. Despite teachers' best efforts, the gaps in pupils' learning are glaring. A number of Year 11 pupils told inspectors that they are not confident that they will achieve what they are capable of in their pending examinations. This view was also expressed by a number of parents.
- Pupils' progress has been impaired by weak teaching and leadership and poor curriculum choices. Although actions have been taken to rectify these aspects, the legacy is still being carried by pupils currently in the school.
- The progress made by pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is not good enough. The provision made for these pupils is not having the desired impact on their learning across the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable in key stage 4. The pupil premium funding has not made any significant differences to the achievement of these pupils.
- Pupils in key stage 3 are making good progress. This includes those who are disadvantaged. These pupils benefit from effective teaching and a suitable curriculum. Any gaps in their learning have been dealt with and not been allowed to escalate.
- Although the proportion of pupils who go on to education, employment and training is high, too many move on having underachieved.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- All students are taught off-site but are on roll at Sandymoor. The sixth form provision is delivered by external providers.
- A significant number of learners join the school for the post-16 provision. Leaders work effectively with leaders at the off-site provision to ensure a good quality of provision. This is supported by good retention figures.
- Attendance and punctuality of students are good. Any concerns regarding students are immediately shared with the school. Students feel safe. The arrangements for safeguarding are routinely checked and meet requirements.
- Leaders carry out monthly visits to the off-site provision. This includes monitoring of learning, scrutiny of work and monitoring of the progress being made by students. The records are of high quality.

- The views of students are sought and used to inform future planning and provision. The students who spoke with inspectors were very positive about their post-16 education. They are complimentary about the quality of careers guidance post-16 and they spoke knowledgeably and realistically about their future plans.
- Students are provided with a range of work experience opportunities. These enhance the effective teaching that they receive and enable them to achieve as well as their peers nationally. All students leave the provision and move on to suitable education, employment and training.
- Students do not achieve well in their English and mathematics resits. This is because the opportunities for this at the off-site provision are limited and too much is dependent on online packages.

School details

Unique reference number	138198
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10044090

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	453
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	68
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Richard Eastburn
Principal	Emma Simpson
Telephone number	01928 571217
Website	www.sandymoorschool.org.uk
Email address	info@sandymoorschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 January 2014

Information about this school

- Sandymoor opened as a free school in September 2012 with 19 pupils. The school planned to offer provision for up to 900 pupils aged between 11 and 18. There are currently 453 pupils on roll. Sandymoor is much smaller than most secondary schools.
- The chief aim of the founders was to build an inclusive, small school that served families from across the socio-economic range.
- The school building opened in September 2014 and offers space for both school and community activities.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is higher than the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational

needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is similar to the national average.
- The principal in post was promoted from the role of vice-principal since the last inspection.
- Five pupils attend alternative provision at The Bridge, Positive Futures and SGI.
- All students on roll in the sixth form are educated off site at the Fowler Education and Football Academy in Liverpool.
- The school did not meet the government's floor standards in 2016 and 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of lessons across subjects and across all year groups. A learning walk took place with senior leaders. Inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at their work.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils and students from all key stages about their experience of school and their learning.
- Inspectors considered 110 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, and 108 written submissions via the free-text service. There were 41 staff responses and 167 pupil responses to Ofsted’s inspection questionnaires. Inspectors also spoke with a number of parents who requested to speak with inspectors.
- Inspectors met with the members of the governing body. Meetings were also held with the principal, senior and middle leaders, and members of staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documentation, including the school’s own self-evaluation and development plan, anonymised performance management documents, school policies and procedures, and the school’s own assessment information. A range of documentation regarding safeguarding was scrutinised, including behaviour and attendance records and bullying logs.

Inspection team

Jonathan Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Paula Arrowsmith	Ofsted Inspector
David Roberts	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Haddock	Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
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