

Verulam School

Brampton Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 4PR

Inspection dates

9–10 October 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders, including governors, have very high expectations of pupils' conduct. Their rapid, thorough and effective response to weaknesses identified in the school's previous inspection has ensured that pupils' personal development, behaviour, welfare and safety are now good.
- Pupils behave well in and out of lessons. There is little disruption to learning. Pupils are typically sensible around the school.
- Most teachers across the school have secure subject knowledge, use questions well and maintain consistent expectations of how pupils should behave. This means that pupils learn well.
- Sixth-form provision is good. Students benefit from strong teaching and helpful guidance on their futures. They make good progress and are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.
- Leaders make particularly good use of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding. The progress of groups of pupils who benefit from these resources is at least in line with, and sometimes better than, others nationally.
- Leaders' clear focus on English, mathematics and science ensures that pupils make particularly strong progress in these subjects. Pupils' progress elsewhere in the curriculum, while still good, is not typically as advanced.
- While leaders' curriculum design enables pupils to learn well across a broad range of subjects, what pupils are taught is occasionally not matched closely to their needs.
- A small number of older pupils resent recent changes to the management of behaviour. These few pupils demonstrate negative attitudes towards school.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the progress pupils make across the curriculum is as strong as it is in English, mathematics and science by:
 - making sure that leaders place the same degree of importance on all subjects as they do on English, mathematics and science
 - refining the curriculum so that all courses are designed, implemented and taught well.
- Improve the negative perception some older pupils have of the way that staff manage their behaviour by explaining to them the reasons for changes more effectively.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The response of leaders and governors to the failings identified in the previous inspection report was immediate and comprehensive. Among their raft of actions, they commissioned a safeguarding check from an external agency, reviewed roles and responsibilities in senior leadership, put safety protocols for off-site activities in place, changed the way in which behaviour is managed and started to speak openly about bullying and other unacceptable behaviours.
- Leaders and governors addressed all recommendations for improvement from the previous inspection with determination. The result of their work has been transformational. Discriminatory behaviour has been almost entirely eradicated. On the very rare occasions that it happens, it is dealt with well. Bullying of all forms is rare and not tolerated by adults. Pupils are safe. They behave well and teachers do not need to waste time managing poor behaviour.
- Leaders recognised that, in collaboration with other schools, they could be even more effective. They embraced the opportunity to join the Alban Academies Trust. The impact of this is already evident in, for example, the development of teaching, learning and assessment. The trust has also effectively supported the school by testing the impact of leaders' work to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Leaders continue to reflect on the effectiveness of provision. Consequently, the school continues to improve.
- Leaders use a range of strategies to improve teaching, learning and assessment. They review the work of teachers and provide training to help them develop. During last year, the focus of improvement in teaching was in how teachers manage behaviour. This worked well. Teachers across the school now manage behaviour in a consistent way. Leaders, teachers and pupils all report the positive impact this has had.
- Additional funding for groups of pupils is utilised to good effect. For example, leaders recognised that some disadvantaged pupils would benefit from extra support in reading to help them access the curriculum. They provided this. Leaders regularly review the progress of disadvantaged pupils and provide additional help for those falling behind. Disadvantaged pupils make good progress compared to other pupils nationally.
- Other additional funding is used equally well. The needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are understood well. They receive effective support from adults across the school so that they are able to make good progress from their starting points. Pupils who join the school with low levels of literacy and numeracy receive targeted support and make accelerated progress as a result.
- Teachers and middle leaders who spoke with inspectors during the inspection expressed confidence in senior leaders. They reflected positively on the training they have had, the effectiveness of new systems for managing behaviour and the support they receive. Their positive views were reflected by pupils' experience of an improved school. The proportion of parents who said they feel the school is well led and managed in their responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, was high.

- Leaders have not typically given the same prominence to subjects other than English, mathematics and science. For example, when determining where to target extra support for pupils, those three subjects have taken priority. Consequently, the good progress pupils make in most subjects is not as strong as in English, mathematics and science.
- Leaders think carefully about what pupils study, when and for how long. They consider the benefit that different programmes of study bring. Because of this, pupils' timetables usually meet their learning needs well. However, in a small number of cases, the curriculum pupils follow does not meet their needs as well as it could. For example, the progress students in the sixth form make in their financial studies is not as strong as it should be. In some arts subjects, the progress of pupils in younger year groups is slowed by the way work and lessons are sequenced.

Governance of the school

- Governors take their role in leading the school extremely seriously. They responded with concern and urgency to the negative outcome of the previous inspection. Governors describe the previous inspection report as a 'moment of transformation' in the history of the school. They were determined to support and hold leaders to account for the next steps they needed to take.
- Governors undertook a 'nuts and bolts' review of senior leadership and implemented change to ensure that the school had the capacity to get better. They rapidly enhanced the way in which they ensure that provision is effective. They now question the information they are provided with more deeply. They check for themselves what is going well and what needs to be better.
- Governors now understand the school well. They value the work of the headteacher and other staff but are unafraid to challenge. They play a valuable role in the ongoing work of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders maintain well-kept records of recruitment checks and ensure that staff have up-to-date training to keep pupils safe. They have effective systems to record concerns about the well-being of pupils. They follow these up in a timely manner, involving external agencies as appropriate.
- Leaders took decisive and effective action to rectify weaknesses in safeguarding identified in the previous inspection report. They have transformed the culture for safeguarding within the school, placing pupils' health, safety and well-being high on the school's agenda. Bullying is rare and dealt with well. New systems keep pupils safe when they are educated off-site or on trips and visits. Leaders are effective in developing pupils' understanding of groups of people in society who are protected from discrimination by law. Pupils are safe, including from prejudice or intolerance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to ensure that lesson time is used well. They set work which motivates and challenges pupils.
- Teachers sequence learning so that work becomes increasingly complex over time. This helps pupils to develop a deeper understanding of what they learn as they move through the school.
- Teachers make sure pupils reflect on their work in a number of ways. For example, teachers make good use of questioning to help pupils articulate their thoughts and consider what they have learned. They ask pupils to review how well they and their peers have completed different tasks. As a consequence, pupils become more secure in their knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers check pupils' understanding effectively. They revisit topics which pupils have found difficult and build on what pupils already know and can do. Consequently, pupils develop well from their starting points.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive effective support from teachers and teaching assistants. Their needs are met well and they have full access to the curriculum.
- Teachers and leaders are consistent in their application of behaviour policies. Behaviour across the school has improved as a result. Disruption to learning is rare.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils come to lessons ready to learn. They readily follow routines and settle quickly to their work. They take pride in what they do and demonstrate consistently positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils are confident to speak in front of other pupils, such as when answering the teacher's questions or reading aloud. Others listen carefully and do not interrupt.
- Leaders have implemented effective systems which directly address concerns from the previous inspection about the well-being of pupils attending off-site provision. For example, pupils are now escorted to the off-site sports field. Regular checks are made on the attendance of the school's pupils who attend different providers for some or all of their education.
- Pupils have faith in adults to protect them from harm. They know that bullying and discrimination will not be tolerated. They feel confident to be themselves. Pupils generally were confident to speak about different sexualities and told inspectors that they found racism unacceptable.
- A small number of older pupils are disgruntled by leaders' new approaches to managing behaviour. They feel that leaders and teachers are too strict. While these pupils do follow rules, they do not fully understand the reasons behind them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a sea change in behaviour.
- Teachers and middle leaders have experienced a tangible change in pupils' behaviour in lessons. They report that they are free to focus on teaching and learning and to not waste time managing behaviour. There is little disruption to learning.
- Around school, pupils maintain their positive behaviour. They are polite and show respect for others. They move purposefully and calmly around the site.
- The success of leaders' work on positive behaviour is evident in the reduction of incidents of pupils being removed from lessons to spend time in the 'Verulam Exclusion Room'. These have fallen significantly since the system was introduced last year. Exclusions from the school remain below the national average.
- Rates of absence and persistent absence continue to be below the national average. No groups of pupils are disproportionately represented by high absence.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils who join the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills typically make more progress than other pupils in English and mathematics through Year 7. This is because leaders use catch-up funding to good effect.
- Leaders have a good understanding of how to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, these pupils make good progress compared to other pupils nationally. In 2018, they made more progress than other pupils nationally.
- A high proportion of pupils take a programme of study which enables them to achieve the English Baccalaureate. The progress they made in 2017 was above the national average, especially in science. Provisional outcomes for 2018 and the work of pupils currently in school indicate that this continues to be the case.
- Over time, the progress pupils make in mathematics and science has been consistently above the national average. Their progress in English, while still good, has not been as strong as these two subjects in recent years. This has now changed. Leaders have built on the already effective practice in English to ensure that pupils are making the same strong progress in English as they are in mathematics and science.
- Pupils study a broad range of subjects at key stage 4. Most of these meet their needs well, help them to make good progress, and prepare them effectively for their next steps after Year 11.
- Progress in most subjects at key stages 3 and 4 is good, but not as strong as in English, mathematics and science. In addition, a minority of courses are not as well structured as most. In these courses, progress is more limited.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is well led. Leaders reflect on what works well and what needs to improve. They make changes accordingly. For example, leaders recognised that outcomes from post-16 English courses in the past have not been as good as they should have been. They have rectified this and students in A-level English now make good progress from their starting points.
- Students make good progress across most post-16 programmes of study, including most vocational and academic courses. This reflects the good teaching students receive. Teaching in the sixth form shares the strengths seen across younger year groups.
- Leaders arrange regular lectures and visits from external speakers covering issues such as diversity, safe driving and human rights. Students and adults lead sessions for others on difference and equality. Students are encouraged to take up leadership roles as senior prefects. Leaders make sure that sixth-form students develop their understanding of the world around them.
- Leaders ensure that students are prepared well for life after school. They provide guidance on applying for university and preparing for apprenticeships or employment. Employers guide students on interview skills and writing a curriculum vitae. Leaders target the advice and guidance they give based on students' aptitudes and aspirations. As a consequence, the proportion of pupils who leave the school to go into education, employment or training is consistently above the national average.
- Most courses and qualifications are appropriate and taught well. Often, students' post-16 work builds well on their key stage 4 programmes of study. A minority of sixth-form provision, such as financial studies, is not as strong. Leaders have not considered the way in which this is taught as effectively as other post-16 courses.

School details

Unique reference number	137038
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10061335

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 Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,090
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	225
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mrs Linda Keen
Headteacher	Mr Paul Ramsey
Telephone number	01727 766 100
Website	www.verulamschool.co.uk/
Email address	paul.ramsey@verulam.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 October 2017

Information about this school

- The school is part of a consortium with Sandringham School and Beaumont School known as 'BeauSandVer'.
- After the previous inspection, the school began working with the Alban Academies Trust. It formally joined the trust in September 2018.
- The chief executive officer of the Alban Academies Trust is accountable to the trust board for the quality of provision across the trust. The trust board delegates responsibility for individual schools to local governing bodies. The headteacher of

Verulam School is responsible for the strategic leadership of the school and reports to the local governing body.

- The trust has recently provided support to the school in developing teaching, learning and assessment and in checking the school's work to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare.
- Some pupils are educated by two other education providers: the Links Academy and Oaklands College.
- The school is a larger than average secondary school serving the area of St Albans.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion who have an education, health and care plan to support their needs is lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders and teachers across the school. They met with members of the local governing body and the chief executive officer of the Alban Academies Trust, as well as speaking with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors visited parts of 68 lessons, sometimes accompanied by leaders, and reviewed the work of pupils in their books. They visited two assemblies and registration groups for Years 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school and improvement plans. They looked at safeguarding records, risk assessments and governing body minutes of meetings. Inspectors also considered the school's information on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors considered the 407 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to a large number of pupils in formal groups, during their free time and during lessons.

Inspection team

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