

Sir William Ramsay School

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

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, leaders and governors have not improved the school sufficiently. Despite developments in teaching and pupils' outcomes, they are not consistently good enough across the school.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Strengths in some parts of the school are not evident throughout. As a result, pupils' learning experiences are too variable.
- Pupils do not achieve as well as they should across the school. Although pupils' attainment and progress are improving over time, they are not consistently good.
- Turbulence since the last inspection has limited governors' capacity to support and challenge to improve this aspect of the school's work.
- Pupils' behaviour out of lessons is not good enough. Pupils, parents and carers are rightly concerned about the standards of pupils' behaviour. Exclusions are declining but remain high.
- Although safeguarding arrangements are effective, leaders' processes and records are not as clear and useful as they could be. This risks limiting the success of leaders' vital and determined work in this area.
- Standards in the sixth form remain variable. Students following academic courses do not achieve as well as they should. Their curriculum choices are limited.

The school has the following strengths

- Staff, including leaders, are deeply committed to improving the school. The headteacher unites them with a common sense of purpose that is rightly focused on improving the quality of teaching. The impact of leaders' actions is clearly evident in some of the school's work.
- Pupils feel safe and well cared for. They are accepting of each other's differences. They show thoughtful consideration towards peers who might otherwise be vulnerable, such as those with physical disabilities.
- The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced across key stages 3 and 4. Pupils particularly enjoy their studies in design and technology, showing pride in what they make.
- In most lessons, pupils conduct themselves appropriately. Where routines are clearly established, they behave well and demonstrate respect. This supports their learning successfully.
- Sixth-form students following vocational courses made very good progress last year.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders' current focus on raising teachers' expectations and developing the precision of their work leads to pupils making consistently good progress across the range of subjects.
- Strengthen the capacity of leadership across the school, so that improvement priorities, including around the administration of safeguarding, are tackled successfully and in a timely way.
- Ensure that pupils consistently conduct themselves as well around the school as they typically do in classrooms, so that instances of poor behaviour decline.

An external review of governance is recommended, in order to consider how the impact of governors' work could be refined and improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, the school has experienced notable changes in leadership and governance. In the year following the departure of the previous headteacher, around a third of the staff and most of the governors left the school. Consequently, the school was slow to begin its journey of development and has, as a result, not improved as much as it should have.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2017. She leads with unwavering determination that pupils should experience the high-quality learning experience they deserve. Her senior leadership team shares her sense of purpose and is working hard to raise standards. Evolving middle leadership is also contributing positively to the development journey. As yet, roles and responsibilities are not clear enough, so staff are not held to account successfully for the impact of their leadership.
- Leaders invest wisely in training to help improve teaching. Their approach is based soundly on tried-and-tested theory. Staff reflect positively on this focus on developing a consistent approach to teaching across the school. However, ongoing changes of staff and staff absence are currently preventing the impact of this work being firmly evident throughout.
- Pupils experience a curriculum that is suitably broad and balanced across key stage 3 and 4. Teachers plan learning that builds pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding over time. Leaders give careful thought to pupils' option choices at key stage 4, to ensure that they are appropriate and engaging, and adapting where necessary to meet very specific needs. Leaders have usefully identified areas for further development, such as increasing the proportions of boys who choose to study a modern foreign language.
- Leaders have recently reviewed how personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is taught, to ensure that learning builds successfully over time. The PSHE programme now prepares pupils for life in modern Britain better than it did in the past. Pupils learn about challenging and sensitive topics in an appropriate way. However, not enough is done to ensure that pupils develop a consistently secure level of understanding. For example, during the inspection, pupils demonstrated the fundamental British value of tolerance, but some were less clear about their understanding of democracy.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those needing to catch up in English and mathematics is used appropriately. Leaders have increased the rigour with which they review the impact of this funding, although this is not currently reflected in how it is reported on the school's website. Pupils' progress is increasing over time, but not always sufficiently for them to catch up as quickly as they need to.
- Leaders responsible for pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are suitably skilled. They know pupils very well and meet their non-academic needs sensitively, particularly those who are registered to the specialist resource bases. Their overview of pupils' academic progress is not as clear.

Governance of the school

- Most governors, including the chair, are new in post since the last inspection. They bring valuable experience and expertise to their roles. This has strengthened the governing body's capacity to hold leaders successfully to account.
- Since the last inspection, governors have actively sought to increase the rigour of their work. The 'external moderator' they have commissioned visits the school regularly. This provides governors with useful information about standards and priorities for improvement. As yet, governors do not routinely use this information to hold leaders firmly to account, for example about levels of exclusion or the impact of additional funding.
- Governors develop their expertise via helpful training. They recruit new members carefully, to widen their collective understanding and effectiveness. While they have an appropriate collective understanding of their responsibilities, they currently lack a sufficiently sharp shared understanding of some aspects of the school's performance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders take appropriate steps to keep pupils safe. The pastoral team provides a helpful point of contact between pupils, their families and the school. Leaders pursue additional help for pupils who need it, looking beyond the school where helpful. This helps pupils to feel safe and well looked after.
- Leaders are diligent in their work to meet pupils' needs. They are currently refining the systems they use to keep records of their actions, to make them more efficient. During this inspection, administrative errors arising during the current changeover to a new system were resolved swiftly and decisively by the headteacher. This reassured inspectors that actions and records are appropriate.
- Governors understand their legal duties with regard to safeguarding. They have recently carried out an audit to check the quality of safeguarding arrangements and are beginning to act on what they learned. The safeguarding link governor keeps other members of the governing body suitably informed about changes to legal duties and the implications for the school. However, the safeguarding and child protection policy has not been updated with sufficient urgency.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Pupils make variable progress, because of the inconsistent quality of teaching they experience. While leaders' work to improve standards is evident in some areas, this is not the case across the school. Pupils' overall learning experience is, at times, further impeded by unavoidable teacher absence and challenges around teacher recruitment, which leaders manage as creatively as they can.
- Where teaching is weaker, teachers' expectations are too low. Lesson activities do not encourage pupils to persevere and write in detail about their learning. Pupils lack the confidence and practice to be able to express their understanding clearly. At times, this causes them to be distracted from their learning.

- Where teaching is more effective, learning activities build successfully on pupils' prior knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils make good use of the helpful feedback teachers give them about their work, in line with the school policy. Teachers use questioning carefully to check pupils' understanding and develop their deeper thinking.
- Leaders' work to improve the learning environment in classrooms has, in the main, been successful. Pupils understand the planned consistent approach to learning, based on a set of shared principles, 'The Ramsey Five'. In the majority of lessons, where these expectations are reinforced, pupils conduct themselves well and the atmosphere enables them to learn. This was particularly evident in mathematics lessons.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is typically strong. They place useful emphasis on subject-specific terminology, which broadens pupils' learning successfully. For example, in a Year 8 science lesson, pupils were exploring their understanding of obesity and malnutrition, considering concepts such as anorexia and vitamin deficiency in a thoughtful way.
- Teaching in design and technology is a particular strength in the school. Pupils enjoy their practical learning, taking pride in what they produce. They work skilfully to produce items such as bags, clocks and hammers.
- Leaders place an important emphasis on ensuring that pupils can, and do, read well. The 'better reading' support programme encourages and supports those who join the school needing to improve their reading. Pupils engage enthusiastically with the adults that help them, gaining confidence in their reading as they improve. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 enjoy their regular opportunities to read alone or with an adult.
- Pupils with SEND are supported well by the resource provision. Adults deliver high-quality speech and language therapy sessions that are effective in supporting pupils' specific needs. This supports pupils' progress in other subjects successfully.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- A significant minority of pupils and parents express concerns about bullying and how well it is dealt with. Leaders acknowledge that their records of bullying incidents are inaccurate because pupils do not always recognise and report them as such. This limits leaders' ability to identify patterns of behaviour that might constitute bullying, and to act to address them as quickly as they could.
- Leaders are developing the PSHE programme and wider work of the school, so that it provides increasing opportunities for pupils' personal development. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to the wider community, through the 'make a difference' campaigns that raise awareness of relevant issues, as well as fundraising for worthy causes. At the present time, this work is not securely embedded. Consequently, some pupils lack confidence and self-assurance, struggling to identify their responsibilities as a learner.
- Staff's care for pupils is highly evident. Pupils generally care about each other and are respectful of the diversity within their school community. However, this does not

always prevent a small minority of pupils from behaving unkindly towards each other.

- Staff work sensitively to support some pupils who are potentially highly vulnerable, including those with specific medical needs. Pupils who are part of the resource bases benefit from carefully thought-out opportunities to share issues that are pertinent to them and the unique challenges they face.
- Pupils in alternative provision respond well. School leaders liaise closely with colleagues at *Aspire*, to ensure that placements are appropriate and pupils' needs are met as well as they can be. Consequently, pupils attending alternative provision are safe and well looked after.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils' reflections about behaviour in the school are mixed. They recognise that things have improved, particularly in lessons, but remain concerned about some behaviour, particularly during social times. Parents say that poor behaviour is not dealt with well enough. During the inspection, it was evident that, at times, pupils required careful supervision in order to maintain appropriate standards of behaviour.
- Leaders have taken useful steps to reduce the proportion of pupils whose behaviour results in a fixed-term exclusion. Leaders have modified their approach in order to make a long-term difference to pupils whose behaviour has been unacceptable in the past, focusing on the cause rather than the symptoms. Their work is beginning to have a positive impact, with instances of repeat exclusion beginning to decline. Permanent exclusions remain above the national average.
- Useful new systems are helping leaders to improve pupils' attendance. Careful monitoring and effective actions have led to a slight reduction in overall absence figures, with some notable impact for a number of individual pupils. Pupils with SEND now attend much more regularly than in the past, as do students in the sixth form. Pupils' rates of attendance are now broadly in line with the national averages.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision are monitored carefully to ensure that they attend and that their behaviour improves. Leaders review pupils' progress regularly, considering what the most appropriate next step is for each pupil. Some pupils respond well to this investment, changing their behaviour and reintegrating successfully back into school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Although standards are rising, they are not consistently high across subjects and year groups. Pupils' progress is strong for some subjects but insufficient for others. Consequently, pupils are not as well prepared for their next steps as they should be.
- Pupils' progress by the end of key stage 4 is much better than at the last inspection. This published measure of pupils' performance was above average in 2018. Pupils' attainment in most subjects by the end of Year 11 was broadly in line with national figures.
- Across the rest of the school, pupils' progress is more variable. Leaders' information about pupils' performance suggests an improving trend in key stage 4. However, the

quality of pupils' work does not consistently match this information. High proportions of pupils are not on track to achieve as well as they should in English, mathematics and science. Similar variation exists lower down the school, with strengths in design and technology and science but weaknesses in some other subjects.

- Disadvantaged pupils' outcomes were disappointing in 2018. Leaders have refocused their work with disadvantaged pupils, to ensure that their efforts have greater impact. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are catching up with other pupils in school and nationally. In some subjects, the proportion of pupils on track to meet their targets is greater for disadvantaged pupils than for non-disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders' work to help pupils with low standards of reading is purposeful. A range of useful strategies support pupils well in developing their reading skills, which boosts their confidence as well as their ability to access the curriculum. Leaders check carefully that this work is making a difference. Some pupils improve their reading ages rapidly, although improvements for others are more gradual.
- Pupils' written work does not reflect the level of understanding that some are able to demonstrate verbally. Their spelling, grammar and punctuation lack accuracy, which impedes their ability to write at length in a suitably detailed way. Teachers' expectations for the quality of pupils' work are not consistently high across the range of subjects.
- Leaders' work makes a positive difference to pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans, contributing successfully to their wider development. However, pupils with SEND do not routinely make the strong academic progress needed to help them catch up towards other pupils nationally.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Despite leaders' persistence, provision in the sixth form is not good enough. The curriculum is too narrow to meet students' needs as well as it should, despite leaders' development of an informal collaboration with another local school. Leaders' effectiveness in monitoring and improving the quality of students' experience has been hampered by managing challenges beyond their control.
- Standards are variable across the sixth form. Students are making better progress than in the past, both in academic and vocational subjects, but do not achieve as well as they should. Students' attainment is typically higher in vocational subjects than it is for A-level courses. In 2018, students completing vocational courses made progress that was well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. While teaching is often purposeful and effective, students' overall experience is affected adversely by staff absence and challenges around teacher recruitment. Some students feel that their teachers could be more ambitious for them, modelling more clearly what the highest standards of attainment should look like in their work.
- Leaders have had some success in improving attendance. Students in Year 12 now come to school more regularly than in the past. Attendance for students in Year 13 remains lower than it should be.
- Students reflect positively about how tutoring and enrichment opportunities have

improved since the last inspection. The 'future pathways' PSHE programme and opportunities to learn leadership skills support their personal development well. Students learn about relevant topics linked to local and global events, such as the Westminster terror attack. They receive helpful careers information and guidance, which enable them to move successfully on to future learning or employment.

- Students contribute significantly to the wider school community, such as by acting as mentors and organising charity events. This helps to raise younger pupils' aspirations and develops sixth-form students' social values successfully. Students are polite and effective ambassadors for their school.
- Leaders have acted on the areas for improvement from the last inspection. Higher proportions of students are retained in the sixth form until the end of Year 13, because they are guided more appropriately onto their courses than in the past. Arrangements for work experience have improved, although a third of students have not yet begun organising this aspect of their learning.
- A small proportion of students join the sixth form needing to improve on their GCSE outcomes in English and mathematics. Leaders ensure that they are supported well. As a result, they improve steadily over time and persevere in order to achieve a higher grade in these subjects by the end of Year 13.

School details

Unique reference number	137256
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10053268

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	985
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	90
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Professor Bryan Mogford
Headteacher	Mrs Christine McLintock
Telephone number	01494 815 211
Website	http://swr.school/
Email address	office@swr.school
Date of previous inspection	22–23 June 2016

Information about this school

- Sir William Ramsay is an average-sized maintained secondary school. It includes a small sixth form, which operates via an informal collaboration with another nearby school.
- The school converted to become an academy in August 2011. It formed a single academy trust in January 2015. Governance is via a local governing body, which incorporates trustees and other locally appointed governors. Most of the governors, including the chair, were not in post at the time of the last inspection.
- Approximately two-thirds of pupils are of White British origin. Almost a fifth of pupils are believed to speak English as an additional language.

- A fifth of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average.
- The school incorporates two resource bases for pupils with SEND, which are funded by the local authority. One supports pupils with hearing impairments and the other is for pupils with physical disabilities. All pupils accessing these resource bases have an EHC plan. Consequently, the proportion of pupils with an EHC plan is double the national average. However, the overall percentage of pupils who have an identified special educational need is below average.
- The previous headteacher resigned prior to the last inspection and left the school at the end of the summer term in 2016. The deputy headteacher held the post of acting headteacher for a year. The current headteacher joined the school in September 2017.
- A small number of pupils attend Aspire, an alternative education provider for pupils with behavioural difficulties.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across the school to observe learning, talk to pupils and look at their work. Some of these visits were carried out alongside school leaders. Inspectors also worked with a group of middle leaders to review a sample of pupils' work from Years 8, 10 and 12.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, and with groups of staff, pupils and governors. The lead inspector spoke to an external consultant who is commissioned by the governing body to work with the school.
- The inspection team reviewed a wide range of relevant documents, which were provided by school leaders or publicly available on the school website. These included policies, minutes of governors' meetings, and leaders' monitoring of pupils' attendance, behaviour and academic achievement. Inspectors also scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the central record of recruitment checks on staff and case studies of pupils perceived to be at risk of harm.
- Inspectors took account of 135 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 133 free-text comments. They also considered survey responses from 41 pupils and 70 members of staff.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Janet Pearce	Her Majesty's Inspector
Suzanne Richards	Ofsted Inspector
Lizzie Jeanes	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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