Writhlington School

Knobsbury Lane, Writhlington, Radstock, Somerset BA3 3NQ

Inspection dates	14–15 May 2019

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	**Good**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Trust leaders and governors recognise that the rate of improvement has not been rapid enough. Therefore, the school has very recently joined a larger multi-academy trust to provide additional capacity to hasten this.

- Governors ask questions of school leaders, but do not probe incisively when actions are not raising standards quickly enough.

- Over recent years, pupils have not made sufficient progress by the end of Year 11, particularly boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

- Leaders do not precisely evaluate the impact of their actions on improving the quality of pupils' learning.

- Teachers are not sufficiently skilled in using assessment information to plan lessons that are well matched to pupils' ability and needs.

- The most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently to reach the highest standards.

- Where teaching is not well planned, pupils are easily distracted and lack curiosity. They do not take pride in their work.

- Some pupils report that they feel uncomfortable when moving around the school site because of boisterous behaviour.

- Overall, rates of attendance are improving, but are still too high for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

- While leaders have developed the programme for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, teachers' expertise has not been suitably developed to support pupils to reflect well enough on these issues.

- A significant minority of parents and carers, and pupils are dissatisfied with aspects of the school's work, such as the quality of communication.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Students are well prepared for their future choices.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, by ensuring that:
  - leaders prioritise their planning, so that there is greater clarity about the impact of actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning
  - trustees and governors challenge leaders stringently so that more rapid improvement is secured
  - leaders sustain recent improvements and share effective practice within the school and from across the trust to reduce variations in teachers' practice
  - leaders further develop the effectiveness of their communication with parents
  - middle leaders closely identify the gaps in subject knowledge, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, so that pupils make better progress.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make stronger progress through each year group, by:
  - developing teachers' skills in using assessment information to plan and adapt their teaching so that it meets the needs of all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and boys
  - providing sufficient and consistent challenge for the most able pupils so that they are well prepared for the next steps in their education and can excel
  - teachers consistently expecting a high standard of work, including in the way it is organised and presented.
- Improve the quality of personal development and behaviour, by:
  - continuing to challenge those pupils who do not attend school regularly
  - ensuring that teaching challenges and enthuses pupils to be more readily involved in their learning
  - consistently managing expectations of behaviour so that all pupils can focus in their lessons and feel comfortable when moving around the school site
  - developing the curriculum for PSHE education further so that teachers are better equipped to support pupils to reflect on a wider range of moral and social issues relevant to life in modern Britain.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- Leaders have acted on some of the conclusions from the previous inspection, but improvements have not been rapid enough. Leaders and governors have reflected on this and, as a result, have recently made the decision to join a larger multi-academy trust. This decision has provided additional capacity and support, as well as a more objective perspective of the effectiveness of leaders' actions.

- Leaders from the trust have worked with school leaders to enable them to draw more widely from effective practice elsewhere. Leaders are open to this support and have readily accepted the advice given. Senior leaders have already tackled teaching that is not at the standard expected and have made substantive changes to leadership roles. They are now better placed to achieve their strategic priorities more quickly.

- Leaders have accurately identified the priorities for improvement and have well-devised plans to achieve these. However, there is a tendency for leaders to be over generous in their assessment of the efficacy of their actions. Leaders too readily point to the modest improvements made as evidence of the overall effectiveness of their work.

- Leaders have established clear expectations of classroom practice. Teachers have received training to support them to develop their pedagogy, and newly qualified teachers are supported well. Leaders visit classes regularly, but their evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and learning is too heavily focused on compliance with the policy, rather than the impact on improving pupils' learning. Teachers, too, are not always able to articulate the effect that training has had on refining their practice. As a result, inconsistencies in teaching persist.

- Middle leaders are developing in their roles and feel well supported by senior leaders. They understand their importance in securing school improvement. They have been working with staff from across the trust to develop their skills to do so. For example, there have been recent improvements in the planning of the mathematics curriculum, and teaching in this area is improving as a result. However, middle leaders are less clear on where the gaps in pupils' subject understanding lie, so that they can plan more precisely to support pupils to overcome these.

- Pastoral middle leaders have a clear focus on the barriers to learning within their year group. They work widely with staff to share information so that pupils are better supported. They articulate high standards of behaviour, but the impact of this is not fully evident in some lessons and in some pupils' behaviour around the school site. Too many pupils are ambivalent in their attitude to school and their learning. Some pupils do not share a sense of pride in their school. This is reflected in the way that they wear their uniform and how well they look after the school site.

- There has been significant turbulence in the leadership for pupils with SEND. The special educational needs coordinator is new in post. She is working hard to establish better systems to identify pupils' needs so that they receive the support they need, including in the involvement of external agencies. The nurture room provides a wide range of interventions, such as craft and gardening projects, as well as support for pupils' academic needs. This is having some impact on improving the progress of pupils

in key stage 3, but is less compelling at key stage 4. Many parents and carers express their dissatisfaction with the level of support provided for their children.

■ The progress made by disadvantaged pupils remains a key priority. Leaders have identified clear strategies to improve the performance of this group. For example, leaders have identified pupils who underperform and have put in place additional interventions to support them. Nonetheless, as teachers do not routinely plan for the needs of such pupils, the overall impact of the strategy is lost. Therefore, the progress that disadvantaged pupils make is not improving quickly enough.

■ Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced. The curriculum includes a wide range of subjects and opportunities for pupils to develop a broad knowledge and understanding. In addition, many pupils, parents and carers speak highly of the extra-curricular opportunities available. Pupils respond positively when they are given leadership opportunities. Some of the independent project work that pupils undertake, such as 'the orchid project', are genuinely impressive and the pupils involved are motivated and enthused.

■ Leaders have established that the development of literacy skills is a key strand of their improvement plan. Therefore, pupils are encouraged to read regularly. This is providing the opportunity for pupils to read for enjoyment, as well as improve their competence. Pupils, particularly in key stage 3, have improved their reading ages because of this strategy.

Governance of the school

■ Governors are fully aware of their statutory duties and exercise these effectively. They have completed relevant training to support their skill in asking questions of school leaders. In addition, they visit the school regularly so that they have a first-hand understanding of the quality of education the school provides.

■ Governors maintain clear records of their visits so that these can be shared more widely with the full governing body. These records include a commentary on the learning points that have arisen from the visits and any action that requires follow up. Nonetheless, they are aware that improvements have not been fast enough. This was pivotal in their decision to join a larger multi-academy trust to increase the capacity for improvement across the school.

■ Senior leaders provide regular information to governors' committees, but governors do not challenge incisively enough when actions are not having the intended impact or are too slow to demonstrate improvement.

Safeguarding

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

■ Leaders ensure that safeguarding is everyone's priority. The mantra that 'when in doubt, there is no doubt' is understood and applied by staff. All statutory checks are in place to ensure that staff are safe to work with children. Staff know how to apply child protection procedures, and relevant updates are a regular feature of staff meetings. These include issues such as radicalisation, exploitation and the existence of county

lines.

- Leaders are compassionate and support vulnerable pupils well. They are conscientious in working with external partners to support pupils who are potentially at risk and network effectively with local partners. Their record keeping clearly outlines the chronology of referral and actions taken.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement

- Leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They understand the areas of strength and those that require further development. Teachers are largely compliant with the agreed expectations, but some lack the skill to use the agreed approaches to support pupils to make better progress.

- Where teaching is weak, expectations are low in terms of completion of work and the quality of presentation. This is particularly evident in the work of disadvantaged pupils, pupils with SEND and boys. Too often, pupils' subject knowledge is weak, and misconceptions are not identified and rectified. Therefore, pupils are not able to build on their prior knowledge effectively or access tasks at the appropriate level.

- In some cases, there are wide discrepancies between pupils' potential and the quality of work they produce. It is not clear how teachers are planning to bridge this gap. Teachers' guidance is not helpful in supporting pupils to understand how they can improve the quality of their work. Where this guidance is given, teachers do not always insist that pupils respond, in line with the agreed policy. Pupils themselves recognise the inconsistencies that exist in the expectations between teachers and subjects.

- Teachers do not always adapt tasks and activities well enough to challenge the most able pupils. Pupils are often given tasks that are too limiting for them. Where pupils have a secure understanding of subject theories and concepts, they are not able to apply this knowledge to demonstrate a higher level of skill.

- Pupils make good progress when lessons are well planned and where teachers' expectations are high. This was evident, for example, in history and philosophy and beliefs. Where teaching is stronger, tasks are pitched at an appropriate level and assessment provides clear guidance about how pupils can improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. Where this is the case, pupils respond well and consequently there is a demonstrable improvement in their understanding. For example, pupils deepened their responses to issues such as climate change, using detailed data to support their views.

- Pupils' attitudes to learning are not always positive. Pupils are often nonchalant about what they are doing or complete tasks in a cursory way. They are often not enthused or motivated by what they are doing. While there were no examples observed during the inspection of wilful defiance or significant behavioural issues, where teachers' planning is ineffective, pupils lack focus and distract the learning of others. Teachers do not always deal with this effectively and so it persists.

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 developed the curriculum so that pupils consider topics that are important to their understanding of personal, social and health issues, such as mental well-being. Teachers have resources that are age appropriate, but the effectiveness of teaching is variable. This is because staff have not received the training that they need to be able to discuss these, often complex and sensitive, issues with pupils effectively. Therefore, pupils can be dismissive or not fully understand why these matters are relevant to them. Some aspects of pupils' understanding are underdeveloped, such as how they can protect themselves from those who might try to influence them with extreme views.

■ Pupils can talk about the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They are aware of the dangers posed by drugs, smoking and alcohol. For example, pupils spoke highly of a recent presentation on drug addiction and the dangers of gang culture.

■ Pupils consider different faiths, cultures and beliefs as part of their curriculum. Many pupils are considerate and understand the importance of tolerance, diversity and respect. For example, there is a well-established lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) group at the school. However, while pupils say that the school encourages pupils to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally, the culture of tolerance is not embedded. Some pupils say that they have been subject to homophobic or racist language and attitudes.

■ The pupil survey completed at the time of the inspection indicates that many pupils do not feel that they have a trusted adult whom they can talk to if they have a concern. Just under half of the pupils who responded felt that bullying is an issue at the school and is not dealt with effectively.

■ Leaders have significantly improved the quality of the information, advice and guidance for pupils about their career choices. The leader of the careers provision is knowledgeable and has carefully evaluated the quality of this work. There have been several high-profile events that have engaged a wide range of external businesses, universities, colleges, parents and carers.

■ A small number of pupils access their education through the Hospital Education Reintegration Service. Leaders make regular contact to ensure that the quality of provision positively supports pupils' academic development and well-being.

Behaviour

■ The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.

■ Senior leaders have raised expectations of how pupils should behave, both in lessons and around the school site. Leaders have restructured the pastoral system to meet the needs of pupils in different year groups more effectively. The majority of pupils respond well to these expectations. However, pupils, parents and carers shared

concerns about the quality of behaviour in lessons, which they say can interrupt learning.

- Pupils say that they feel safe at school, but younger pupils say that they dislike the boisterous behaviour and use of poor language that they experience when moving around the site. A significant number of staff share concerns about how effectively behaviour is managed.

- Rates of exclusion are reducing but are still higher than national figures. Leaders have made improvements to the support provided for pupils who find behaviour expectations difficult to manage. The restorative nature of this work and its effectiveness are reflected in the reduction of pupils who are internally excluded on more than one occasion. The school is inclusive in its philosophy. There is an integrity in the way in which leaders continue to try to engage such pupils.

- Leaders are aware of the reasons for high absence rates and are taking steps to rectify this. Leadership roles have been re-defined so that there is increased capacity to hasten the rate of improvement. As a result, there has been a slight decrease in levels of absence overall, but this is modest and remains a significant issue for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.

Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement

- Over the last three years, the progress that pupils make by the end of Year 11 has modestly improved, particularly for low-prior-attaining pupils. However, overall standards remain significantly below the national average. The proportion of pupils who achieved a strong pass in both English and mathematics is also below the national average.

- Pupils' underperformance is particularly notable in science and modern foreign languages. The work scrutinised during the inspection shows some signs of improvement, particularly for key stage 3 pupils, but this is not yet compelling because of the variability in the quality of teaching in these areas. The continued improvement of pupils' performance in humanities over the last three years is evident in the work of current pupils.

- The progress that pupils make in English, particularly boys, has been well below the national average for the last three years. Leaders have highlighted this area for scrutiny and, while teaching remains inconsistent, there is emerging evidence that pupils are becoming more confident in their ability to sustain their writing and analyse texts more assuredly.

- The progress that pupils have made in mathematics has been well below the national average for the last three years. Recently, staff have worked with leaders from the trust to develop a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics. This has focused on developing mathematical fluency and then applying these skills to more complex problem-solving and reasoning tasks. As a result, current pupils are making better progress.

- The most able pupils make progress in line with their peers nationally, overall. However, historically, they have not made sufficient progress in English, science and in modern foreign languages. The work of current pupils shows that this

underperformance continues as pupils are not directed to tasks that are well matched to their level of ability.

- The progress of disadvantaged pupils has been a concern over the last three years. Partly this is due to pupils who arrive at the school in key stage 4 or who are persistently absent. However, largely it is because teachers' planning is not well directed to the needs of this cohort. Leaders have identified a clear set of strategies to guide teachers, but these are not consistently followed and so have limited impact.

- Pupils with SEND do not make sufficient progress from their respective starting points. While the overview of SEND provision is improving due to the changes in leadership, the support pupils receive in lessons is not targeted well enough to meet their needs.

- Scrutiny of pupils' work and the improved assessment systems in place shows that pupils in key stage 3 are making better progress than has been the case in the past. There is some improvement in what pupils know, understand and can do in a range of different subjects, which is preparing them better for the next stage of their education.

- Leaders identify pupils who fall behind or who arrive at the school with standards of literacy and numeracy below those expected for their age. The interventions in place are beginning to support pupils to catch up with their peers, but the impact of individual interventions is not fully evaluated to inform future expenditure.

16 to 19 study programmes	Good

- Leaders responded positively to the conclusions of the previous inspection and have made significant improvements to the sixth-form provision. Leaders are enthusiastic and ambitious for all their students. Students are overwhelmingly positive about their experience and their attitudes to learning are good.

- Leaders regularly review the curriculum so that there are courses that are well suited to the needs of different cohorts. For example, an introductory course to prepare students for post-16 education, tailored to the needs of students with SEND, was successful in preparing students for the next stage of their education.

- Leaders carefully track the performance of subjects and individual students and, as a result, standards are improving. Where students fall behind, support is provided to help them get back on track. The success of this approach is shown in the improvements in the rate of attendance, and improving outcomes overall.

- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge and effective questioning to support students to build up the body of knowledge required to be successful learners at this level. Students are confident in their teachers and are well prepared for their forthcoming examinations.

- Students feel well supported to make the transition to post-16 study because of the effectiveness of the advice they receive. Overall, students successfully complete the courses on which they enrol. In addition, students are encouraged to take part in an array of enrichment activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and the National Citizen Service. Students organise charity events and work with younger pupils to provide support.

- Students enhance their programmes of study with high-quality work placements and

value this as an important part of their curriculum.

■ The comprehensive life skills programme is very well received. Students genuinely appreciate the contributions from external visitors, who provide information on topics such as personal finance, driving safely and online safety, including the 'Prevent' duty.

■ Students are also supported to develop their own research projects, and this prepares them well for the demands of higher education. Leaders have worked with success to increase the proportion of students who attain higher education places, including at Russell Group universities.

■ Students who enter the sixth form without suitable qualifications in English and mathematics are well supported and, as a result, the large majority of students improve their grades in these subjects.

School details

Unique reference number	137548
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset Council
Inspection number	10088317

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
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	1,282
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	300
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Stuart Warrener
Headteacher	Mark Everett
Telephone number	01761 433581
Website	www.writhlington.org.uk
Email address	slock@writhlington.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 January 2017

Information about this school

■ Writhlington School was formerly part of the Dragonfly Education Trust. This merged with the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership in April 2019. The trust consists of 15 primary schools, six secondary schools and one sixth-form provider. Under the scheme of delegation, the trust is responsible for the standards that pupils reach at the school. The board of directors delegates some functions to the local governing body. Trust officers provide support for the school.

■ The school is larger than the average sized 11–18 secondary school. There was a larger than average decrease in the number of pupils between 2017 and 2018.

■ The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the national

average.

- Most pupils are White British. The school has 12 out of the 17 possible ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average.

- There was a larger than average increase in the proportion of pupils with SEND support, which is now in line with the national average. The number of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is also in line with that seen nationally.

- A small number of pupils access alternative provision at the Hospital Education Reintegration Service.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a range of subjects and age groups and scrutinised pupils' written work. Observations were conducted jointly with members of the leadership team.

- Meetings were held with members of the leadership team and representatives from the trust and governing body. In addition, inspectors met with curriculum and pastoral leaders.

- Inspectors met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their experience of school.

- Inspectors looked at the school's documentation, including the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and priorities for future improvement. Inspectors reviewed progress, behaviour and attendance information relating to current pupils, and governors' records.

- School policies relating to safeguarding, pupils' behaviour, the use of additional funding (including the pupil premium), and the curriculum were scrutinised.

- Inspectors considered the 182 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including free-text responses, 193 responses to the pupil survey and 76 responses to the staff survey. The lead inspector also considered an email sent by a parent.

Inspection team

Sarah McGinnis, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Julia Chapman	Ofsted Inspector
Stuart Ingram	Ofsted Inspector
David New	Ofsted Inspector
Suzanne Richards	Ofsted Inspector

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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