School report

St Helena School

Sheepen Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3LE

Inspection dates 12–13 December 2017

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**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school is well led. Senior leaders and governors are ambitious for the pupils and provide a good quality of education for them.
- Teaching and learning is consistently good across most subjects. Teachers plan engaging lessons, and give pupils useful feedback that helps most of them to make good progress.
- Staff know the pupils well and plan for their needs. The curriculum, pastoral care and ethos support pupil welfare and progress.
- Pupils attend school well and their attitudes to learning are positive. They have good relationships with each other and their teachers. Pupils are keen to do well.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff work well with pupils and parents to ensure that pupils are safe.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They understand the school's values such as respect and responsibility. The school is a harmonious community.
- Governors support and challenge senior leaders well. They have high ambitions for the school. Their plans help improve outcomes for pupils.
- Progress for some groups of pupils is improving. However, pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities need to make better progress.
- The quality of teaching in modern foreign languages needs to improve.
- Leaders at all levels need to evaluate more precisely the effectiveness of their improvement plans.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that improvement plans raise the achievement of all pupils, particularly the most-able or those who are disadvantaged, by:
  - ensuring that staff systematically evaluate the impact of the actions listed in their plans
  - providing support for middle leaders to evaluate precisely the effectiveness of their own areas of responsibility.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching in modern foreign languages improves.
- Ensure that interventions for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities lead to expected or better progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good

- The school is well led. The headteacher has a strong commitment to providing a quality education for pupils and is driving a programme of continuous improvement across all areas of the school. The extended leadership team has focused more on the progress of vulnerable groups, leading to improved outcomes for these pupils.
- Subject leaders are fully focused on the school's agenda of raising standards. The leadership in English and science are at the forefront in securing excellent outcomes and provide a good model of leadership at departmental level. The new pastoral leaders provide useful pastoral support that helps pupils achieve better.
- Leaders' secure systems to track pupils' achievement help them to accurately assess the school priorities. For example, the school development plan rightly identifies improving outcomes for the most-able and disadvantaged pupils. Evidence from pupils' books and the school's assessment information shows that these groups are now making better progress. However, leaders are not completely sure which strategies have made the greatest impact.
- Leaders use additional funding to ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive the support they need. This includes an extensive, school-wide programme of quality teaching supported through staff training on questioning and the effective analysis of pupils' learning skills. Leaders have invested well in their resources and interventions to ensure that disadvantaged pupils continue to make good progress.
- The curriculum is well planned and offers a range of subjects that supports pupils' personal and academic development. The school also provides a good range of extra-curricular trips and clubs including science and engineering, sports, and arts clubs. Trips abroad to support learning in lessons are popular, such as visits to war memorial sites.
- The school's contribution to pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Leaders have worked hard to promote the school's seven values including resilience, respect and responsibility. Religious studies and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education are taught as discrete subjects, allowing for greater exploration of ethical topics. This approach helps to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain well.
- Staff are very positive about the school's leaders. They enjoy working at the school and are proud of their community. They share the leaders' commitment to an excellent education for their pupils. Much of the staff training is delivered by colleagues and the staff value the expertise among them. Newly qualified staff praise the support and training they receive.
- Leaders acknowledge that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities need to make better progress. There is a wide range of interventions in place, but leaders can only give a rudimentary account of the impact that the funding is having. There are signs of improvement. Leaders are evaluating the effectiveness of their interventions more accurately, but this practice is not yet systematic.

- Senior leaders recognise the need to evaluate the impact of their work effectively. However, some senior and middle leaders were not able to assess precisely the difference their actions had made to pupils' learning.

Governance of the school

- Current governors are rigorous in their work. They are proactive in their support of the leadership team and give generously of their time.
- Governors ensure that staff performance is managed well. Staff are set ambitious targets linked to improving pupils' progress. Governors have high ambitions for pupils' achievement.
- Governors play an active role in safeguarding. They audit the school's safeguarding processes by checking records, visiting the school regularly and raising issues of safeguarding practice during governing body meetings.
- The school is supported by the Sigma Trust. Trustees know the school's improvement priorities well, and provide training and additional support for school leaders. Governors were instrumental in seeking the support and facilitating the transition to the trust.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff have received appropriate training and leaders work effectively with outside agencies, including alternative providers, to keep pupils safe.
- Pupils and parents agree that the school keeps them safe. Pupils enjoy their PSHE lessons where they are taught about staying safe online, caring for each other as citizens and respecting the rights of others in accordance with British values.
- Pupils are clear who to speak to if they need support and they told inspectors that the staff are caring towards them. Bullying is rare and pupils feel that staff deal with it well if it does occur.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment — Good

- Teaching and learning is good in the majority of subjects. Teachers have a secure subject knowledge and plan lessons that pupils find motivating and help them learn well.
- The monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment across the curriculum is thorough. Most subjects have strong links between assessments and what pupils are learning. As a result, teachers have a clear idea of what pupils need to learn in their lesson. The English, science and humanities departments are particularly strong in this regard.
- Across the curriculum, teachers use questioning well. One-to-one questioning is particularly effective, as teachers check for understanding and then shape tasks accordingly. Positive relationships and high pupil engagement is a consistent feature across many subjects, which helps pupils make good progress.

- There is a strong culture of effective feedback across the majority of subjects. Pupils redraft and improve their work to a high standard because of this. They demonstrate resilience and are not downhearted about their mistakes. This 'making a difference' strategy across the school supports pupils well to develop a mastery of subjects.
- Typically, teachers plan challenging and engaging lessons which help pupils make good progress. Teachers are aware of disadvantaged pupils who may need extra support or intervention, and this is provided. Leaders need to ensure that the impact of intervention is continually reviewed and adapted to meet pupils' needs. The most-able pupils benefit from the focus of challenging lessons and they use the feedback from teachers to make complex changes to their work. This is supporting their progress, which is now improving.
- There has been a sharp focus on reading over the last 18 months; consequently, pupils are developing a genuine love of reading. The new librarian has engaged pupils in challenging initiatives. For instance, over 400 pupils took part recently in a reading challenge. As a result, pupils can read confidently, can discuss difficult texts and are making good progress, especially in the lower years.
- Following a period of concern, leaders have taken appropriate steps to ensure that the teaching in mathematics is improving. The actions taken show immediate signs of success and pupils' progress in all years for mathematics is now improving.
- Leaders recognise that teaching in modern foreign languages is not as strong as in other subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare	**Good**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are taught to value each other and that it is okay to be different. Pupils comment that all are welcome and appreciated.
- Staff are committed to pupils' well-being. There is extensive provision to ensure that pupils are well supported and feel valued. The 'glimpse of brilliance' strategy is one example of how staff regularly recognise the value of pupils' contribution to the academic or pastoral life of the school.
- Pupils engage well in conversations about British values and are explicitly taught about diversity and tolerance of different faiths and cultures. The community is friendly, as confirmed by the responses from the pupil and staff surveys.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to serve the local community. They raise money for charities, donate to local food banks and serve in local elderly people's homes. The corridors are adorned with photographs and pupils' art work celebrating their activities.
- Leaders listen carefully to what pupils have to say about their school. An example of this was the day where staff and pupils worked together to determine the next phase of the school's journey of improvement. Pupils presented their contribution in a life-sized display.

- The school maintains effective communication with the providers of alternative provision and the pupils who attend this progress well. This is because their individual needs are carefully evaluated so they can be placed on appropriate courses.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite and courteous and take pride in their work and environment. They move around the site in an orderly fashion and are quick to make visitors feel welcome.
- Pupils naturally celebrate the success of their classmates. They have good relationships with each other and their teachers and their good behaviour helps them to learn during lessons. Behaviour in cover lessons is less positive.
- Teachers manage poor behaviour in a non-confrontational manner. This is a positive feature of their classroom management skills that allows lessons to proceed smoothly.
- Bullying is rare in school. Pupils and staff are very positive about the way leaders deal with bullying if it does occur. Pupils recognise the school's emphasis on teaching them to respect each other.
- Pupils' attendance to school is good. Attendance is above average and pupils say they enjoy coming to school. Persistent absence is below average; nevertheless, the school continues to evaluate the success of strategies to promote good attendance. Leaders recognise the need to increase the levels of punctuality to morning registration.
- The school has not permanently excluded a pupil for six years. Fixed-term exclusions are managed well and pupils understand the school's commitment to good behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils — Good

- In 2017, outcomes in most subjects were in line with or rapidly moving towards national averages. Progress was particularly strong in English.
- The outcomes in mathematics were below average in 2017. Leaders have taken robust action to address the issues that led to some pupils underachieving. The school's own information shows that current pupils are making better progress in mathematics across all year groups.
- The profile of current Year 11 pupils indicates that all groups are on track to show significant improvement at GCSE. Leaders were able to demonstrate how interventions, such as individual mentoring and early morning classes, are already proving effective.
- Pupils in key stage 3 make particularly strong progress in English, science and humanities because of the good teaching they regularly receive. Leaders are aware of the previous fluctuations in progress in other subjects and have put in place useful strategies to tackle underachievement. School achievement information confirms that pupils now make better progress across a range of subjects.
- Leaders ensure that there are appropriate pathways for pupils to follow when they leave school. They are justly proud that every single pupil is in education, training or work at the end of key stage 4. The careers information, advice and guidance they receive is particularly effective.

- Progress for the most-able and disadvantaged pupils was below average in 2017. The trust increased the capacity of leaders to focus on these groups. As a result, progress for these pupils has significantly improved.
- While there are some notable exceptions, overall progress for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities was below average in 2017 and remains so for current pupils. Leaders are yet to fully evaluate the impact of strategies targeted at these pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	137944
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10037664

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy convertor
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	928
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Barry Avis
Executive Headteacher	Zoë King
Telephone number	01206 572253
Website	www.st-helena.essex.sch.uk
Email address	contact@sthelena.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–19 June 2014

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard for attainment and progress.
- St Helena School is an average-sized secondary school with a slightly higher proportion of girls than boys. It converted to become an academy in March 2012.
- The school formally joined the Sigma Trust in September 2016.
- The majority of pupils are from White British heritage. Fifteen per cent of pupils are from a range of different minority ethnic heritages.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is above average.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well below average.
- There are more pupils joining or leaving the school outside the usual admission dates than found nationally.
- Four pupils study GCSE and vocational courses at the pupil referral unit in Essex.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited over 45 lessons across two days to observe learning and scrutinise pupils' work. Some of these visits occurred jointly with a member of the school's senior leadership team. Inspectors scrutinised a sample of books from each year group.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils, members of the governing body and representatives from the Sigma Trust.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, at social times and during transitions between lessons. Inspectors also spoke with leaders of the alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including: school procedures and policies, minutes of governing body meetings, records, policies and procedures relating to safeguarding, exclusion and attendance documentation, leaders' evaluation of school performance and pre-employment checks.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through the 51 responses received via Parent View, some of which included written responses, 109 pupil responses and 36 staff responses.

Inspection team

Diana Osagie, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Whear	Ofsted Inspector
Lynn Ayling	Ofsted Inspector
Gwyneth Gibson	Her Majesty's Inspector

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