

Westlands School

Westlands Avenue, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 1PF

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2019

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	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and senior leaders lead the school with passion and determination. Staff strongly support leaders' vision.
- Leaders from the Swale Academies Trust and governors know exactly what the school's strengths are and those aspects which could be even better. Leaders are fully committed to the school's further improvement and appropriate actions are under way.
- Staff and pupils benefit from the high-quality professional development available through the trust. Collaboration between subject leaders is particularly effective. As a result, teaching, learning and assessment are improving rapidly.
- Teachers' strong subject knowledge fosters an eagerness to learn across the school. Pupils show positive attitudes.
- Teaching is good. The most effective teachers use questions well to encourage pupils to explain their thinking. However, there are some inconsistencies in teaching, and not all pupils are supported or challenged well enough to do their best.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. The school is a harmonious environment, with pupils showing respect towards each other and adults. Strong relationships between staff and pupils help pupils feel safe and secure.
- Current pupils are making good progress. GCSE results show that, previously, disadvantaged pupils made slower progress than other pupils nationally. Leaders' actions have ensured that differences are now diminishing for disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress. However, the most able pupils do not achieve as well as they should, although their progress is improving.
- Arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective. Vulnerable pupils receive timely and effective support when required.
- The rich curriculum offers pupils a very wide range of subjects, enriched by a range of extra-curricular activities. The 'values' curriculum supports pupils' emotional well-being and personal development very well during Years 7 to 9.
- Careers education, advice and guidance has been given fresh impetus and is developing well.
- Following a strengthening of leadership, the sixth form is improving rapidly. Students are now making good progress, overall.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers:
 - refine the way they use assessment of pupils' learning to build on what pupils already know, understand and can do
 - challenge all pupils, particularly the most able pupils, to think deeply and explain what they have learned precisely.
- Improve pupils' outcomes by:
 - ensuring that strategies to improve the learning of disadvantaged pupils are used consistently throughout the school and their impact on pupils' progress is regularly evaluated
 - increasing the challenge provided for the most able pupils, so that they achieve their best in each subject.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school based on strong core values which permeate the school. Senior and middle leaders, governors and staff share the ambition to provide the best possible learning and personal experiences for the pupils. Hard-working leaders at all levels demonstrate passion and resilience.
- Historically, several schools in the Swale Academies Trust have benefited from the expertise of leaders from Westlands School. However, since the last inspection, some aspects of Westland School's effectiveness declined. Turnover of leaders and staff has now stabilised, and governors and trust leaders are rebalancing how much advice Westlands' leaders offer other schools with the levels of challenge and support provided for Westlands.
- Trust and school leaders at all levels share an accurate understanding of the strengths of the school, as well as those aspects of the school which could be even better. This has led to helpful bespoke training and support. The impact of this can be seen in the improvements in the quality of teaching and the consistent approaches to teaching and behaviour management across the school. Leadership capacity for further improvement is evident.
- Senior and trust leaders hold subject leaders and teachers firmly to account for pupils' progress. Any weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning are picked up quickly through leaders' rigorous checks on pupils' progress, and precise training is provided.
- Staff feel well supported and appreciate the range of training and professional development opportunities available within the trust. Newly qualified teachers are very well supported.
- Teaching overall is good and enhanced by subject-specialist teachers, although there is some variation in the quality of teaching across and within subjects. Subject leaders show a determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning further by implementing a range of responses to address aspects which could be even better.
- The leadership of provision for pupils with SEND is strong. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND receive effective support and challenge. Accurate identification of pupils' individual needs means that pupils are well supported in their academic learning and personal development. Pupils from the specialist resource provision for physical disability and dyslexia are catered for very well and make good progress against their individual targets.
- Leaders are now addressing with greater urgency the underperformance of disadvantaged pupils. Senior leaders have been slow to use pupil premium funding effectively to improve the progress of these pupils. GCSE results show that this group of pupils did not make good enough progress overall in the last two years. Also, leaders focused on the 'gap' in performance between disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils in the school, rather than considering the progress made by disadvantaged pupils with that made nationally by other pupils with similar starting points. Leaders are now using pupil premium funding more effectively to increase the

progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school, for example by improving their attendance and providing extra tuition to help address gaps in their knowledge.

- The curriculum provides impressive breadth. Leaders are rightly proud of the varied curriculum on offer to pupils. Pupils can study academic courses at GCSE and also have a wide choice of arts, technology and some vocational subjects. Leaders acknowledge that starting rigorous GCSE subjects in Year 9 is too early for some pupils and are planning to change this in the future. The taught curriculum is enhanced by a range of extra-curricular activities, designed to provide enrichment as well as developing pupils' character.
- A determination to improve pupils' writing skills underpins the curriculum. Leaders recognise the importance of helping pupils throughout the school to use subject-specific vocabulary to explain their thinking accurately.
- The school's 'values' curriculum, which encompasses personal, health and social education, citizenship and religious studies, is well delivered during Years 7 to 9. Its emphasis on emotional well-being demonstrates leaders' commitment to pupils' mental health. During Years 10 and 11, restricted teaching time of the 'values' curriculum limits pupils' knowledge and awareness of issues pertinent to their age. Careers education at the school is improving rapidly, under new leadership, although previous gaps in provision have not yet been successfully addressed.
- Of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, eight out of 10 would recommend the school to other parents. The school is oversubscribed for entry into Year 7.

Governance of the school

- The academy trust has strengthened governance by reorganising local governance into a sharper body: the 'challenge committee'. The chair of this committee, who is part of the trust's school improvement team, brings helpful educational expertise.
- Committee members and trustees have an accurate understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the school. They offer leaders robust challenge and appropriate support to bring about the necessary improvements.
- Previously, governors did not hold leaders to account effectively for the use of pupil premium funding to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils throughout the school. Current governors commissioned a review of the spending and are beginning to hold leaders to account for the impact of this expenditure more effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders' emphasis on pupils' well-being has ensured a culture of safeguarding which permeates the school community. Safeguarding systems and practices are very well organised. Statutory procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with children are efficiently managed.
- The senior safeguarding leader uses her expertise to ensure that regular training and updates about safeguarding are effective. Staff have good communication with parents

and work tenaciously with other agencies should they be worried about a pupil. Pupils feel safe in school. They are confident in knowing there is always a trusted adult they can speak to in school if they are worried about something.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils benefit from teachers' secure subject knowledge across a wide range of subjects. Strong relationships and teachers' high expectations create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Where teaching leads to good or better achievement, skilful questioning probes pupils' thinking, to develop deep understanding.
- Following a review by the trust, leaders acted decisively to further improve the consistency and quality of teaching and learning. A new strategy for teaching has been introduced across the school which builds challenge into lessons, based on raised expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils find this structured approach to lessons helpful and report that teachers regularly expect more difficult work to be tackled.
- During most lessons, teachers check pupils' understanding and respond to their needs, providing additional support or challenge as required. Teachers give effective feedback to pupils about their learning and are generally quick to pick up and address any misunderstandings and identify ways forward.
- In most lessons, pupils settle quickly and, due to the consistency of delivery across the school, know what to expect. In a few instances, when tasks are not well matched to pupils' starting points, they lose interest, and this slows their progress.
- During lessons, teachers increasingly expect pupils across the curriculum to write in more depth to raise achievement. Currently, some pupils still do not express their ideas with enough clarity. During the inspection, the most effective teaching supported pupils to sequence their thinking before writing, and thus write more coherently and accurately.
- Where teaching leads to good progress, assessment information about what pupils know and understand is used effectively to identify pupils' starting points for new learning and to spot gaps and misconceptions. This practice is used particularly well in mathematics, where pupils' learning is generally strong, and their progress is above national levels.
- Strengthened leadership coupled with higher expectations has led to rapidly improved teaching in English. Pupils' analytical skills and textual evaluation are much better than they were. A focus on vocabulary enrichment is also helping pupils to make better progress. Targeted intervention and reorganisation of groups are addressing the gaps in pupils' learning due to previously weaker teaching.
- Teaching in some subjects across the school is more variable. Pupils show outstanding levels of engagement and motivation in some lessons, including vocational, practical and academic subjects. However, on a few occasions, across the curriculum, pupils are presented with tasks which they are not equipped to tackle, and they lose interest, which limits their progress. Some science teaching is highly effective, but at other times, work presented to pupils does not build securely on their prior knowledge and understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Teachers and pastoral leaders have created a caring environment with high expectations about the way pupils treat others.
- Staff know pupils well, respond in a timely manner to any concerns and maintain contact with parents as much as possible.
- Pupils say they feel happy and safe. Pupils trust the adults in school and say that their concerns are taken seriously. They say that instances of bullying are rare, and staff act swiftly to resolve any issues.
- Careers education and guidance is emerging as a strength of the school. The careers officer is leading a determined response to improve provision against the published benchmarks. She has introduced a programme to raise pupils' awareness from Year 8 of the range of opportunities available to them, before they make their GCSE option choices. Pupils in Year 11 and students in the sixth form benefit from a variety of careers initiatives, although the improved provision has yet to be offered to Years 9 and 10.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. The school tracks their attendance and progress regularly, working with these providers to ensure that the personalised programmes support the pupils effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Routines are well established. Consistent application of policies alongside a commitment to inclusion contribute to a respectful and harmonious environment.
- In lessons and around school, pupils' conduct is good, and the school is an orderly, well-organised environment for learning. Pupils are polite and show consideration for others. They are punctual to lessons, fully equipped and are ready to get on with their learning as soon as they arrive. Occasionally, a few pupils are inattentive when work is not well matched to their needs.
- Pupils' attendance is broadly similar to the national average and is improving. The school has worked effectively with individual families to improve the attendance of those pupils where there is a cause for concern.
- Leaders use a range of effective strategies to maintain a low level of fixed-term exclusions. Some administrative errors in recording attendance appropriately were rectified before the end of the inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Standards are rising across the school in many subjects due to sharper leadership and better teaching. The school's performance information, along with work seen during

the inspection, shows that progress is improving. Overall, outcomes are good, although there is some inconsistency between and within subjects.

- GCSE results for 2018 showed that pupils' progress is in line with the national average. However, progress for high-prior attainers and disadvantaged pupils was significantly below the national average. The school's performance information shows that current Year 11 pupils are on track to reach higher levels of attainment this year.
- Staff analyse assessment information thoroughly and track the progress of groups of pupils closely. Leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to raise the achievement of the most able pupils. Changes to the structure of lessons are helping these pupils to reach higher levels. However, work seen in lessons and in books shows that some of the most able pupils could be further stretched and challenged.
- During work scrutiny, inspectors found a high standard of work, overall. Following teachers' emphasis on extended writing, many pupils write convincing accounts to explain their thinking when they are required to do so. However, these high expectations of writing are applied inconsistently, and sometimes pupils' work does not reach the highest standards.
- Pupils with SEND make strong progress from their different starting points. Additional support enables these pupils to make rapid gains because it caters precisely for their individual needs and links very well to work in class.
- Disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress than previously. Leaders' strategies are beginning to have more impact on the rate of progress of disadvantaged pupils across the school.
- The development of pupils' literacy skills is a clear priority, and opportunities are taken, across the curriculum, to promote pupils' verbal and writing skills.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Sixth-form provision has improved and is good, due to better leadership.
- In 2018, students' progress on their A-level courses was below that of students with similar starting points nationally. Leaders responded rapidly and decisively. They identified where improvement was needed, implemented tighter systems and raised accountability. Current students are making better progress than previously in many subjects.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Inspection evidence, including talking to students and looking at their work, shows that teachers' secure subject knowledge, high expectations and skilful questioning are extending students' learning well. Teachers' strong subject expertise helps to interest students and promote high levels of engagement.
- However, there is variation between subjects and within subjects. Where learning is less effective, students are not routinely expected to explain their thinking accurately and succinctly. Expectations are not consistently high enough to enable the most able students to achieve the highest A-level grades across the curriculum.

- Retention of students from Year 12 into Year 13 is higher than national levels. Recruitment from the school's Year 11 is increasing. Pupils in Year 11 are well informed about the range of post-16 opportunities available to them.
- Students behave well, and their attendance is good. Some students act as mentors to younger pupils, supporting them with their reading and well-being.
- The school meets the 16 to 19 programmes of study requirements. However, some of the non-qualification activity undertaken by the students is not precisely tailored to support their progression. Suitable work experience for students is not consistently well planned or systematically evaluated.
- Personal development and careers programmes are improving. These programmes have a positive effect on students' well-being and future employability. Students benefit from individual guidance to support their next steps.

School details

Unique reference number	136286
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10084285

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 (non-selective)
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	1,580
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	182
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Paul Goodson
Headteacher	Simon Cox
Telephone number	01795 477475
Website	www.westlands.org.uk
Email address	office@westlands.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 October 2012

Information about this school

- The school is a member of The Swale Academy Trust.
- The school is larger than the average-sized non-selective secondary school, located within a selective area.
- The proportion of SEND pupils with an education, health and care plan is above the national average. The school has a special facility for pupils who have physical and another for dyslexia

- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of those who speak English as an additional language are well below national averages.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is in line with the national average.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at a specialised unit within Swale Academies Trust.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 55 lessons. Most of these lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a wide sample of pupils' books.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the headteacher, although he was absent for most of the inspection due to an injury. Inspectors also met the acting headteacher, the executive headteacher, senior and middle leaders, other staff, and the chief executive officer of the trust. The lead inspector also met the chair of the governors' challenge committee.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and around the school. They also met formally with groups of pupils and considered the views from the 49 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- Inspectors took account of the 157 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including information available on the school's website and records relating to pupils' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour. Information on governance, including minutes of governors' meetings, was examined. The school's self-evaluation summary and the school improvement plan were scrutinised, along with records of the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

Theresa Phillips, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Victoria Webster	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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