

Fulston Manor School

Brenchley Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 4EG

Inspection dates

13–14 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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- After a dip in standards in 2016, leaders and governors acted swiftly to reverse the decline. As a result, outcomes have improved in most subjects.
- Leaders at all levels are strongly committed to improving the school and have heightened their expectations of pupils' achievement.
- Consequently, current pupils are making better progress than in the past. Disadvantaged pupils are catching up with their peers.
- Governors provide effective challenge and support to staff. They hold senior and middle leaders to account through their regular meetings with departmental leaders.
- Teaching is strong in the majority of subjects and improving in the rest, particularly in mathematics. This is a result of effective strategies to hone teachers' skills and support their professional development.
- The vast majority of pupils are keen to learn. Most behave well in lessons and around the building, and have strong relationships with teachers. However, a few occasionally disrupt the learning of others.
- The house system is integral to the school and is very effective in supporting pupils' personal development and welfare.
- The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Pupils say that they feel safe because staff know them well and they have confidence that any issues will be dealt with.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils receive plenty of help when they are making their option choices to ensure that they are on the right pathway.
- The sixth form is good. Teaching is often particularly strong in this area of the school and students are well supported in their learning. As a result, outcomes are improving quickly for students following both academic and vocational courses.
- Most pupils attend school regularly and arrive on time. However, some disadvantaged pupils do not attend as often as they should, which hampers their learning and personal development.
- Leaders recognise that there is more to do to improve standards. While pupils are making better progress than in the past, the most able are not always set work that challenges them sufficiently.
- School improvement priorities and processes are not always sharply enough defined or evaluated. Consequently, the pace of improvement in some areas is not as fast as it could be.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment and so improve standards and progress, especially in mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that teachers have higher expectations of what pupils can achieve, especially the most able
 - giving pupils work that is challenging and makes them think hard.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the school's key priorities for improvement are clearly articulated and understood by all
 - sharpening procedures to enable leaders and governors to evaluate the impact of actions on the progress of all groups of pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the decline in standards in 2016, the headteacher, supported by governors and an able senior leadership team, has taken decisive action to reverse the downward trend. As a result, pupils' achievement improved in 2017, especially that of disadvantaged pupils, and the school is now on a much more stable footing.
- Leaders at all levels have heightened their expectations. Systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and holding staff to account, have been tightened up. Regular, challenging meetings between senior and middle leaders are ensuring that leaders are kept on their toes and not allowed to become complacent, which was a danger in the past.
- The arrangements for reviewing teachers' performance are now particularly robust. Staff have targets linked to pupils' performance, and are not awarded a pay rise if these targets are not met. Governors make sure that they take an active role in overseeing these decisions.
- A significant number of staff changes in the recent past have hampered some pupils' progress. Leaders are working hard to find innovative solutions to the challenges of staff recruitment, particularly in shortage subject areas such as mathematics and science. As a result, staffing is now more stable and pupils told inspectors that they appreciate the greater consistency in their learning.
- Staff have responded well to the increased rigour asked of them. Those that participated in the staff questionnaire are very positive about the school and are keen to take an active part in its improvement journey.
- Relationships across the school are strong and there is a great sense of community and moving forward together. New teachers, to the school and to the profession, told inspectors how much they value the support they receive and the welcoming and cohesive atmosphere that pervades the school.
- The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is strong. Senior leaders who visited lessons with inspectors, and middle leaders who looked at samples of work with inspectors, demonstrated that they have an accurate view of the quality of teaching.
- Leaders regularly analyse pupils' progress in each subject and accurately identify those who need extra support. For example, leaders have used additional funding for disadvantaged pupils successfully, as evidenced by the improvement in this group's rate of progress. The same is true of funding for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. These pupils are making solid progress from their starting points.
- Leaders place a great deal of emphasis on developing teachers' professional skills. There is a comprehensive programme of in-school training, which is bespoke to teachers' and departments' particular needs. Many teachers are also encouraged to develop their leadership skills through access to accredited external programmes. As a result, teachers are improving their skills quickly, which is having a marked impact on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

- The curriculum offers pupils a wide range of opportunities to suit their interests and aspirations. Recently added vocational courses, at key stage 4 and in the sixth form, have broadened the range of subjects on offer and have been carefully chosen to provide progression from one phase to the next. Consequently, the curriculum is increasingly meeting the needs of a diverse community of pupils.
- The taught curriculum is strongly supported by a very wide range of out-of-school activities, including trips and visits, concerts and pantomimes. Many clubs are also on offer. Such activities are broadening pupils' horizons and developing their wider skills. The school website provides lively accounts of all these events, showcasing the vibrancy of the school community.
- The provision for pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is a strength of the school. Pupils receive fortnightly input on such issues as self-esteem, taking responsibility and the rule of law. Citizenship lessons and assemblies enhance the input, with outside speakers often invited to address key topics. For example, when school leaders identified an issue with texting, a police officer delivered workshops to pupils, staff and parents on online safety. As a result of all this provision, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of equalities issues relating to disability, gender, sexuality and gender identity. Pupils are tolerant and welcoming of others' differences. They told inspectors that the small number of homophobic comments they witness are quickly dealt with. School staff recognise the need to prepare pupils for living in a diverse society and the subject is a recurring focus of citizenship lessons.
- Senior leaders have a solid understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. However, key priorities and actions to achieve them are not always clearly enough articulated, understood and focused upon by everyone across the school. As a result, leaders and governors' ability to evaluate the impact of actions with sufficient rigour and clarity is hampered, which slows progress down.

Governance of the school

- Governors are effective in holding leaders to account for their work to improve the school. Each governor is linked to a particular department or aspect of the school, and they meet key leaders regularly. This strategy is enabling them to have a more in-depth view of specific aspects of the school and to ask relevant questions to support and challenge staff.
- The governing body is committed to the school. Members bring a range of relevant skills and experience, such as from business, law and local government, to their discussions. While some are relatively new to their roles, they are developing their knowledge of the school and their confidence to challenge school leaders.
- Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively. They undertake regular training relating to areas such as radicalisation and understanding school performance information. They also ensure that they oversee the school's work to keep pupils safe.
- Governors work closely with school leaders to make decisions about teachers' pay. They make sure that pay rises are awarded appropriately when teachers meet targets related to pupils' progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding has a high priority and is integral to the culture of the school. All appropriate checks are carried out assiduously and record-keeping is thorough and methodical.
- There are strong systems in place to protect pupils from harm. Staff know their pupils very well and the efficiently run house system enables issues to be identified and dealt with swiftly. Pupils are confident to seek help when they experience difficulties. Leaders carry out extensive follow-up work, often with external agencies, to make sure that pupils and families get the help that they need.
- Staff and governors undertake regular training to ensure that they are constantly up to date with safeguarding information. Pupils and parents have confidence in the school's ability to keep pupils safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good in many subjects. Generally, teachers are adept at developing, consolidating and deepening pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. As a result, the majority make solid progress from their starting points.
- In the most effective examples of learning, teachers use their strong subject knowledge and skilful questioning to probe and deepen pupils' understanding. They plan work which meets pupils' individual needs well, and they have high expectations of what pupils can do and achieve. Where teachers encourage pupils to collaborate and share their ideas, progress is particularly rapid.
- Inspectors saw several occasions where teachers helped pupils to apply their knowledge to real-life situations, or to examination questions. In some subjects, such as photography, art and textiles, pupils were given the opportunity to refine their work. In these instances, pupils' knowledge and understanding were strengthened still further.
- Since the last inspection, the school has focused on developing teachers' ability to give pupils advice on how to improve their work. In the best examples seen, the guidance given moves pupils' learning to the next level and teachers give pupils time in lessons to think about and act on the advice. Strong examples of this were seen in modern foreign languages and in history, but it is not yet universal across the school.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are very strong. Humour is used appropriately and helps to make classrooms positive and welcoming places for pupils to learn. Older pupils generally settle to work more quickly than younger ones, a few of whom sometimes engage in low-level disruption.
- Teachers recognise that changes to staffing and weaker teaching in the past have left gaps in some pupils' knowledge. Many teachers go out of their way to offer pupils opportunities to catch up after school, and pupils greatly appreciate this level of support.

- Work in pupils' books, together with observations of learning, show that pupils are developing their literacy skills well across the curriculum. They are confident to read aloud, to verbalise their ideas and, increasingly, to write fluently and in an extended way.
- Parents are given regular and useful information about their children's progress through parents' evenings and assessment information, which is sent home several times each year. Parents appreciate this information and one said, 'As parents we are kept well informed of progress and attainment through emails and parents' evenings. Staff are approachable and helpful.'
- Pupils' mathematical skills are improving overall, particularly their number skills. They are less confident with problem-solving and reasoning. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics, particularly for the most able, is slower than in some other subjects.
- Where the teaching is less effective, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can do and achieve, and the work is not always matched to pupils' specific needs. This is particularly true of the most able pupils, who are not routinely given work that challenges them to think hard.

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 respectful of each other and confident in their learning. With the help and guidance of school staff, they are learning the skills they need to embody the school's motto of 'everybody matters, everybody succeeds, everybody helps.'
- In addition to the comprehensive citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, pupils gain valuable understanding from assemblies. For example, during the inspection, pupils had a house assembly which focused on a number of core values such as respecting one another, being the best you can be and helping one another in times of difficulty. Such strategies are helping pupils to understand the importance of developing as whole individuals.
- Pupils appreciate the house system and the sense of belonging to an identified entity. They particularly value the strong support they receive from their head of house, and the fact that they are known as individuals in a large school. School leaders are conscientious in monitoring the welfare of particularly vulnerable pupils, such as those with mental health issues.
- Parents who responded to the online questionnaire are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They appreciate the opportunities offered and the support that pupils receive. One parent wrote: 'My child has excelled since she has been at the school, both academically and personally. Their strong, secure core values underpin all decisions made and pupils' achievements are celebrated whatever their ability or interests. It is a school that supports children to be all that they can be.'
- Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare and they know whom to go to if they have a problem. They have confidence that it will be dealt with swiftly. House staff provide 'bully boxes' for pupils to report any incidents, and safe spaces for pupils to go to if

they feel vulnerable. The number of bullying incidents has decreased in the school over time.

- The 'Bridge' facility provides targeted support for a small number of vulnerable pupils and those who struggle to manage their behaviour. This individualised help is having a positive impact on the welfare and learning of these pupils.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe from threats such as online bullying. However, they do not yet have a firm enough grasp of how to protect themselves from the risk of radicalisation or extremism.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite, friendly and helpful and generally behave very well in lessons and around the building. During breaktimes and lunchtimes, they socialise happily together and interact well with each other and with staff. They wear their uniform smartly and keep the school free from litter.
- Leaders' actions have been effective in reducing the number of exclusions. Pupils who join the school from elsewhere, often with significant difficulties in managing their behaviour, integrate well and stay the course.
- School leaders have worked hard to improve levels of attendance. A number of strategies have been implemented which are having demonstrable impact on reducing the number of days pupils miss school. It has been particularly effective in improving attendance rates in the sixth form. In the rest of the school, absence rates overall, and for those who are persistently absent, are broadly in line with the national average.
- However, some disadvantaged pupils miss much more school than they should, which is affecting their learning and progress. Although improving, leaders are aware that there is more work to do in this area before levels of attendance are good.
- In some lessons, particularly in key stage 3, a few pupils occasionally disrupt the learning of others. Although staff usually deal with this well, it slows progress down and frustrates other pupils who want to learn.
- The few pupils who attend off-site provision benefit from specific support to help them manage their behaviour. As a result, most behave well.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Achievement has gone up significantly in the past year. After the last inspection, school staff underestimated the increased rigours of GCSE examinations and did not prepare pupils well enough for the challenges they faced. This, combined with some discontinuity of teaching due to staff changes, resulted in published outcomes dipping considerably in 2016. Pupils made less progress than they should across a range of subjects. Disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of most-able pupils was particularly weak, especially in mathematics.
- School leaders, who initially had been slow to recognise the impending decline, last year responded quickly with a raft of measures, including training for staff, tighter monitoring of pupils' progress and a more rigorous approach to poor behaviour. As a

result, provisional progress information for 2017 shows a much better picture. Pupils' outcomes in English and English Baccalaureate subjects improved considerably. Disadvantaged pupils made great strides forward in catching up with their peers.

- Current pupils in the school are making steady and sustained progress across the majority of subjects and year groups. The school's progress information, backed up by evidence from pupils' work in books and in lessons, shows strong progress in, for example, history, geography, textiles, art, French and religious education.
- In the past, teachers were overgenerous in their judgements of pupils' achievement. To address this, subject staff now work routinely with teachers in a number of local schools to ensure that their assessments are accurate. In 2017, their predictions of GCSE outcomes were much more on track.
- Pupils make solid progress in English, mathematics and science. Of the three, progress in mathematics is the most inconsistent, due to a legacy of some poor teaching in the past and staffing changes. However, stronger departmental leadership and the support from senior leaders have given the subject solid foundations on which to build and there is clear evidence of improvement.
- Disadvantaged pupils are now making much better progress, though they still lag behind their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. Leaders have a defined strategy in place to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are prioritised in lessons, but not all staff adhere to this policy. Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, however, is being well spent on providing extra support for targeted pupils, which is having a positive effect on helping them to make more rapid progress.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site provision. They follow a programme tailored to their needs and are making expected progress from their starting points. School staff have regular contact with their counterparts in the off-site institution to check up on pupils' attendance, safety and progress.
- Reading is given high priority across the school. The new library is popular with pupils and they are enthusiastic about events, such as book weeks and reading competitions. Pupils read regularly in tutor time and in class and the impact can be seen in their literacy development across the curriculum. Last year, leaders used Year 7 catch-up funding to help targeted pupils with their reading. As a result, these pupils' reading skills developed well.
- In the main, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making similar progress from their starting points to that of other pupils. However, some very low ability pupils are being set unrealistic targets and are making slower progress. Where class teachers adapt the work for the specific needs of each pupil, progress is more rapid, though not all teachers are yet doing this. Some learning support assistants are very skilled in supporting pupils in class and helping them to make faster progress.
- Careers education, guidance and support are strengths of the school. All pupils, throughout the school, receive input through their PSHE lessons, supplemented by external advisers and the school's dedicated careers adviser. Pupils in Year 11 have individual careers interviews and receive strong support to make the decisions on their next steps. As a result, very few leave the school without entering employment, education or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The school's sixth form provides academic and vocational A-level courses for a large number of students. Leaders recognise the programme's strengths and weaknesses, and are addressing the weaker areas.
- Outcomes in the past, especially for academic A-level courses, have been below average, though better for vocational courses. As a result, leaders introduced more training for staff, improved systems to track and monitor students' progress and implemented swifter interventions when students were falling behind.
- Strong, and sometimes very strong, teaching coupled with the impact of improvement strategies means that students currently on roll are making good progress on their chosen courses. The school's assessment information shows that students in Year 13 are on track to achieve improved outcomes in both academic and vocational subjects, compared to last year. Inspection evidence supports this view.
- A few students retook GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics last year. Those that did made better progress in English than in mathematics.
- Inspectors saw a number of lessons, such as in art and textiles, where probing questioning, careful planning, well-managed discussions and high expectations enabled students to make rapid gains in their learning. Students responded positively to the affirming atmosphere in the classroom, based on a solid bedrock of mutually respectful relationships.
- Students are very positive about their experiences in the sixth form. They enjoy the welcoming atmosphere, the high-quality teaching and support, and the facilities provided in the new sixth-form block.
- Students' personal development is well catered for, through targeted lessons and the enrichment programme. In particular, students are benefiting from help to develop their resilience and independence. The impact can be seen in greatly improved attendance figures in the sixth form.
- Staff know their students well and offer them valuable support in making choices and with their personal issues. Students and parents appreciate how many staff 'go the extra mile' for them. One parent said: 'The staff are amazing and give up so much of their time, and my son is really well supported.'
- The curriculum provides a good range of academic and vocational courses. Leaders are continuing to develop provision effectively, having recently expanded the choice of vocational options to meet the needs of more learners. Some courses, such as film studies, are offered in response to students' requests.
- Students benefit from a range of enrichment activities, including access to work-experience placements. In addition, students are involved in activities such as mentoring lower-school pupils, and helping them with their reading and writing. Student leadership opportunities are provided through, for example, membership of the student council. Such activities are preparing students well for life beyond school.

- The strength of the main school's careers education and guidance programme is continued in the sixth form. Students have access to a wide range of advice within the school, such as from the careers adviser, as well as from external sources.
- Leaders take care to ensure that students in Year 11 seeking a pathway beyond Fulston Manor are well supported in exploring all possibilities. In Year 13, appropriate advice and guidance mean that the vast majority of students progress onto education, training and employment.
- School staff are aware that they need to sharpen their development plans further to ensure that more students complete their courses and achieve the highest grades possible.

School details

Unique reference number	136324
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10039659

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive (non-selective)
School category	Academy
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	1,277
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	297
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Rita Couzins
Headteacher	Alan Brookes
Telephone number	01795 475228
Website	www.fulstonmanor.kent.sch.uk
Email address	mail@fulstonmanor.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 February 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.
- Fulston Manor School is a larger-than-average secondary school. It is a non-selective school in a local authority where high numbers of schools select pupils by ability.
- The school forms part of the Fulston Manor Academies Trust (FMAT) with South Avenue Primary School.

- The headteacher is a national leader of education.
- The school currently uses an alternative provider, The Swale Inclusion Service, to provide alternative education for a small number of pupils in key stages 3 and 4.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- About a quarter of pupils in the school are eligible for support from the pupil premium (additional government funding), which is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school met the government's current floor standards in 2016, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress from key stage 2 to key stage 4.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 4 academic performance results in 2015 and 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 58 lessons, several of them jointly with senior leaders. They also visited an assembly and form time.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work in books. Inspectors also examined a selection of pupils' books in key stages 3 and 4, with school leaders, to give a broader picture of progress over time.
- Inspectors held regular meetings with senior leaders and with a range of staff, including newly qualified teachers and staff new to the school. Inspectors also spoke informally to many other staff. One inspector telephoned staff at the off-site provision.
- The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body and spoke to the chair of governors on the telephone. She also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 179 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as the written comments submitted by 178 parents. Two parents also sent comments directly to Ofsted. Inspectors examined 106 responses to the staff questionnaire. Pupils' views were gathered from 449 responses through the online survey, and through meetings with groups of pupils from Years 7 to 13.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documentation. This included the school's evaluation of its performance, the school's plan for improvement, information about standards and progress, the school's website, logs about behaviour and attendance, as well as a range of policies.

Inspection team

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Colin Lankester	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Cox	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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