

Sir Herbert Leon Academy

Fern Grove, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK2 3HQ

Inspection dates

12–13 September 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils, in particular boys and the most able, do not make enough progress in English, mathematics and science. Consequently, by the time they leave school, pupils' outcomes in these subjects are below national averages.
- The differences between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and others in academic subjects are not diminishing quickly enough in key stage 4.
- The quality of teaching in academic subjects is too variable. Teachers' planning does not always take account of what pupils already know and can do. Pupils do not make sufficient progress because the work set does not meet their needs.
- Overall absence and persistent absence are higher than the national averages for secondary schools.

The school has the following strengths

- The principal provides resolute and determined leadership. Supported by her senior team, she has led significant improvements in the quality of education.
- Pupils with low prior attainment and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities do particularly well.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and at break and lunchtimes. They look smart in their uniforms and keep the site free from litter and graffiti.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides well for pupils' personal development. Pupils make strong progress in a range of vocational subjects, including in the sixth form.
- Leaders and governors make increasingly effective use of additional funding to help remove barriers for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils.
- Students in the sixth form benefit from consistently strong teaching and achieve outcomes that are in line with national averages.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eliminate any remaining variability in the quality of teaching by giving pupils work to do that is consistently demanding and that meets their needs.
- Improve outcomes so that all pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, boys, and the most able, make progress in line with their challenging targets.
- Ensure that rates of attendance, including for pupils who are frequently absent, match national averages for secondary schools.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal has won the trust and confidence of the whole school community with the clarity of her vision and her utter commitment to raising standards of achievement. With her senior team, she has worked tenaciously to secure significant improvements in all areas of the school's work since the previous inspection.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are tireless in their efforts to address the priorities for improvement. They are careful to base their actions on rigorous evidence, and they take account of any implications for teachers' workload when identifying actions to be taken.
- Well-established systems are in place to track pupils' progress. The sponsoring trust provides strong support for assessment. As a result, leaders have a detailed understanding of how well different groups of pupils are doing across the curriculum. They have rightly identified that boys and the most able pupils need to do better. They make effective use of this information to set challenging targets and put in place extra help for pupils who need it.
- Teachers feel well supported. They speak positively about the opportunities they have to learn new skills from experts in the trust and from their colleagues in school. Leaders check the quality of teaching carefully and make sure that training for teachers is focused on the areas of most need. Where standards in teaching fall short of what is required, leaders act rapidly to secure the necessary improvements.
- Until recently, the school struggled to recruit and retain teachers. This year staffing is more stable. For example, English, mathematics and science are now taught by specialists in these subjects. As a result, the quality of teaching is more consistent and pupils are starting to make better progress.
- Leaders pay particular attention to the needs of vulnerable pupils, those who are disadvantaged and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders accept that disadvantaged pupils need to make more sustained progress. They use all available funding to promote pupils' learning and well-being and to remove any barriers to their progress.
- Staff share leaders' commitment to providing a challenging and engaging curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. Recently appointed subject leaders have played a key role in revising the curriculum in English, mathematics and science. As a result, topics studied in these subjects are now more challenging, systematically building pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding as they move up the school.
- Pupils can choose from a wide range of vocational subjects in key stage 4 and in the sixth form. In subjects such as health and social care and sports science, leaders have forged successful partnerships with community groups, including the local football team, to enrich pupils' experience. Consequently, pupils enjoy and do well in these subjects.
- Leaders make strong provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are taught about British values and the needs and rights of

different groups of people. As a result, pupils have a sound understanding of what it means to live in a diverse society and are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- Over the last year, the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) has made well-considered changes to the composition of the local governing board. Consequently, the board now contains a very strong element of educational expertise, which has made a significant contribution to the recent rapid improvements in the school.
- Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They are assiduous in carrying out their duties and they provide leaders with a strong degree of challenge. At the same time, the knowledge and experience governors bring enable them to provide practical and helpful support to leaders in areas such as safeguarding, behaviour, attendance and assessment.
- Minutes of governing body meetings show that governors keep a watchful eye on finances, including the pupil premium, Year 7 catch-up funding, and money to support pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- This is a school that puts pupils' well-being at the heart of all that it does. Aware that the school serves a community with higher-than-average levels of disadvantage, staff go the extra mile to make sure that pupils feel safe and secure. They have created a warm and nurturing culture. From the weekly visits of 'Teddy the dog', to the daily breakfast club and dedicated quiet rooms, vulnerable pupils receive exceptionally strong support.
- The safeguarding lead, who is highly regarded in the locality, has built a skilled team around her. As a result, staff receive regular and up-to-the-minute training in all aspects of child protection. Staff recognise the responsibilities they have, understand how to voice any safeguarding concerns, and are confident that they know how to spot the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm.
- The safeguarding lead works closely with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that pupils get timely and effective support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection, when they were judged to be inadequate. However, the quality of teaching overall is not yet good, and remains variable across the school.
- Where teaching over time is less effective, teachers do not take account of what pupils already know and can do when setting work. Pupils, in particular boys and the most able pupils, do not make sufficient progress because the work they are given to do is either too hard or too easy.

- In some cases, teachers do not always check pupils' understanding of topics studied. Consequently, any misconceptions that pupils may have are not identified and addressed quickly enough.
- Teachers do not always make pupils work hard enough, so that, over time, pupils do not learn and remember important information. As a result, when it comes to sitting tests and examinations, pupils do not do as well as they should have done.
- However, where teaching is most effective, teachers use their expert subject knowledge to plan teaching that is skilfully matched to pupils' needs. Pupils gain and remember new knowledge, skills and understanding. For example, in mathematics teachers now focus more sharply on enabling pupils to improve their mathematical accuracy and fluency.
- Increasingly, teachers provide pupils with appropriate levels of challenge. They require pupils to master new content by thinking deeply and working problems out for themselves. For example, in music a group of Year 11 pupils were engrossed in writing and performing their own compositions.
- When the work set is closely matched to their needs pupils settle down quickly and give thoughtful responses to their teachers' questions. For example, in Year 11 English pupils deepened their understanding of character in a spirited discussion about Romeo's motives in the play 'Romeo and Juliet'.
- Pupils say that they like it when they are given time to improve their work. In line with the school's policy on feedback to pupils, teachers now provide increasing opportunities for pupils to correct their mistakes or go deeper into the topics studied.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils take pride in their school and their work. They are keen to do well and are ambitious for their futures. The majority of pupils are punctual to their lessons.
- Pupils like their teachers and believe that teaching has improved over the last year. They also say that teachers help them when they get stuck.
- Pupils wear their uniforms smartly, and they look after the fabric of the building well. They rarely drop litter, and they are polite to visitors.
- Staff at all levels are committed to pupils' emotional well-being and safety. Those with specific responsibilities for pupils' welfare make sure that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need in a timely fashion. Leaders have forged productive relationships with a wide range of external groups and agencies that provide invaluable support to pupils who may be in difficulty.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that bullying rarely occurs. They believe that teachers deal effectively with any bullying that does take place. If they are worried about anything, pupils know who they can talk to and they are confident that they will be listened to.

- Leaders cater well for pupils' physical development. A varied physical education curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to take part in competitive sport and a wide range of after-school activities.
- Pupils have access to more clubs, trips and visits than previously. Pupils speak enthusiastically about the annual 'big day out', while pupils in Year 9 are looking forward to being involved in a production of 'Annie' later this year.
- Leaders give pupils opportunities to take responsibility and develop their leadership skills, for example as representatives of their form or house, or as a member of the school council. Pupils say that leaders take their views seriously. For example, pupils' feedback has resulted in changes to canteen menus and the provision of quiet spaces at break and lunchtimes.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. Pupils know about the risks of online grooming and about current topics such as knife crime and substance abuse.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision for all or some of their timetable are well cared for. They benefit from appropriate personal development opportunities that focus on helping them to manage their own behaviour and make plans for their futures.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff and pupils agree that behaviour is the aspect of the school that has improved most in recent times.
- The school is now a calm and orderly environment because staff follow the agreed policy consistently and pupils understand the consequences of poor behaviour.
- Low-level disruption in lessons is rare, and pupils conduct themselves sensibly when moving about the school.
- Historically, fixed-term exclusions have been high. In the last year, the number of exclusions has fallen significantly, and this trend looks likely to continue.
- While attendance has improved, levels of absence and persistent absence remain above national averages for secondary schools.
- Leaders are tireless in their efforts to encourage regular attendance. They work closely with the families of those pupils who are absent too often, and their efforts are increasingly successful. For example, some pupils who previously had low levels of attendance now come to school every day.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Published outcomes show that in 2017 pupils made average overall progress from their lower-than-average starting points. Pupils with low prior attainment did particularly well across the board. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, made progress that was significantly above national averages in both vocational subjects and modern foreign languages.

- A legacy of weak teaching over time meant that pupils' outcomes in English, mathematics and science were well below average in 2017. In addition, disadvantaged pupils made much less progress than other pupils nationally in these subjects.
- Despite leaders' and teachers' best efforts, gaps in knowledge caused by weaker teaching over time have resulted in disappointing outcomes for some groups of pupils in 2018. Provisional results for 2018 indicate that the attainment and progress of pupils in vocational subjects remained strong.
- Evidence from visits to lessons, pupils' workbooks and leaders' tracking information shows that current pupils are making more sustained progress than previous cohorts.
- Throughout key stage 3, pupils are matching or exceeding their targets in most subjects. Girls, pupils who speak English as an additional language, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities are making sustained progress in key stage 3.
- In key stage 4, current pupils do well in vocational or practical subjects such as health and social care, product design, catering and sport. Girls, and pupils who speak English as an additional language, are doing particularly well in these and other subjects.
- Because of leaders' more effective use of pupil premium funding, differences between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school are diminishing rapidly, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- Pupils in Year 7 who have fallen behind or who need to catch up receive timely help with their reading, writing and mathematical skills. Pupils who had low levels of literacy when they arrived in the school last year made impressive gains in their reading ages as a result of the support they received.
- Work seen in pupils' books from the last 12 months shows that, in most subjects, the quality of work improved rapidly during this period. For example, in English pupils had more opportunities to write at length using a widening range of sentence structures and vocabulary. In many subjects the level of challenge increased over the year. For example, pupils demonstrated increasingly strong skills of analysis and evaluation in health and social care.
- Despite overall improvements in the progress of current pupils, work seen in their books and leaders' own records show that boys and the most able pupils do not do as well as they could.
- Those pupils who attend alternative provision for all or some of their timetable follow an appropriate curriculum and are making progress in line with their targets.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The quality of teaching over time is more consistent in the sixth form than in the rest of the school. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to set challenging tasks and ask probing questions. Teachers know their students well and track their progress carefully.
- Relationships between staff and students are cordial, and students appreciate the lengths to which their teachers go to help them. Students behave well, attend regularly, and are strong role models for younger pupils in the school.

- The curriculum is compliant with national requirements for 16 to 19 study programmes and is well matched to students' interests and aptitudes. For example, sports science is delivered through an innovative partnership with the local football team, while students new to the sixth form are excited about the new animal-care course. A-level criminology is popular, and the first set of provisional AS results for 2018 suggests that 40% of the cohort achieved grades A or B.
- Leaders make effective provision for students' personal development and welfare. A well-designed personal, social, health and economics education programme helps to ensure that students are prepared well for life, study and work when they leave school.
- Students get strong support from their teachers and a range of outside agencies for education about careers and next steps. Leaders do all they can to raise students' aspirations by encouraging them to aim high and consider a range of options. At the time of this inspection, students were engaged in activities ranging from university visits to briefings on interview skills and how to apply for apprenticeships.
- An increasing proportion of students go on to university. In 2018, all students progressed to education, further training or employment at the end of their courses.
- Historically, outcomes in the sixth form have been stronger than in the rest of the school. In 2017, students taking A-level academic or vocational courses made progress that was in line with national averages. However, pupils' attainment in vocational courses is higher than it is in academic subjects.
- In 2017, a higher-than-average proportion of students sitting retakes in GCSE English or mathematics improved their grades.
- Although the sixth form is growing in size, leaders are aware that small groups, particularly for academic subjects, may not be viable. Leaders have taken sensible steps to ensure that all courses have sufficient numbers of students studying on them.

School details

Unique reference number	138439
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10045404

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
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	614
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	145
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Beverley Perin
Principal	Jo Trevenna
Telephone number	01908 624720
Website	www.shlacademy.org
Email address	gjerome@shlacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	13–14 October 2016

Information about this school

- Sir Herbert Leon Academy is a smaller than average mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged from 11 to 19.
- The school is a sponsored academy within the AET.
- Overall responsibility for the school lies with AET's board of trustees, who delegate day-to-day oversight of the school to a local governing board.
- A small number of pupils from Years 9 to 11 attend alternative provision at the Bridge Academy, Milton Keynes, for all or some of their curriculum.

- The school draws on valuable challenge and support from AET's director of secondary education, AET's designated safeguarding lead and the headteachers of two other AET academies. They also sit on the school's local governing board.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 25 lessons and one assembly. The majority of these visits were carried out with school leaders. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour around the school and at break and lunchtimes.
- Sixth formers were engaged in induction activities, including visits to local universities, during this inspection and so no timetabled lessons took place. The lead inspector observed some of the induction activities and spoke with sixth-form students and leaders. He also took account of evidence gained from post-16 lesson observations and a review of students' work carried out during the most recent monitoring visit that took place in February 2018.
- Inspectors reviewed samples of work from this year and last year across a range of subjects in key stages 3 and 4.
- Meetings were held with the principal, vice-principals, assistant principals and the SEN coordinator. In addition, inspectors spoke to groups of staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector spoke to the chair of governors on the telephone and met with members of the governing body, two of whom are also employed by AET.
- An inspector met with the executive principal of the Bridge Academy to discuss the progress, behaviour and personal development of pupils who attend alternative provision.
- Arrangements for safeguarding were reviewed, including the school's single central record of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors took account of surveys that leaders have carried out with parents, typically during parents' evenings. They also considered 11 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Gary Holden, lead inspector

Keith Pailthorpe

Her Majesty's Inspector

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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