

# Warden Park School

Broad Street, Cuckfield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH17 5DP

## Inspection dates

19–20 January 2017

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                 | <b>Good</b>        |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | <b>Good</b>        |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Outcomes for pupils                          | <b>Good</b>        |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good               |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- In three years, the enthusiastic headteacher and senior leaders have raised standards in all years at the same time as protecting the school's very special culture and atmosphere.
- GCSE results in the EBacc subjects were well above average in 2016. Over four out of five pupils achieved high-quality grades in English and mathematics.
- Learning about life lessons encapsulate the outstanding, broad education pupils receive. Pupils are very well prepared for their future lives as thoughtful, considerate and knowledgeable citizens.
- The supportive governing body contributes strongly to the school's success and popularity. Governors have backed senior leaders' successful improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- The questions posed in lesson are sometimes not challenging enough to stretch pupils' thinking and extend their understanding.
- A few differences between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of other pupils still remain to be tackled.
- All pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, some of whom are registered in a Special Support Centre (SSC), receive the very best care, guidance and support they need. They are fully integrated into school life and lessons.
- Learning has moved into a higher gear with the introduction of tablets for all pupils. Teachers and pupils use them in many effective ways to generate rapid progress.
- Teachers are specialists in their subjects, which helps them to assess pupils' work accurately and identify the next steps to follow in lessons.
- Pupils behave extremely well both in lessons and around the school. They are considerate, thoughtful and keen to do well. Their relationships with staff are mutually respectful. They feel safe at school.
- The school's marking policy is not followed consistently by all staff so the quality of guidance that pupils receive varies.
- Some of the most able pupils' achievements are not as high as they could be from their starting points.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To raise achievement:
  - intensify the level of challenge for the most able pupils and make sure they tackle work which matches the demands of high-grade GCSE questions
  - make sure that disadvantaged pupils' progress in Years 10 and 11 matches that of others by intervening as early as possible if their progress slows down.
- To improve learning:
  - insist on the consistent application of the school's marking and feedback policy so that it helps all pupils to know how to improve their work
  - strengthen the range, style and depth of questions posed to pupils so they have to think hard about the work they are doing and can identify what they do or do not understand.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- The headteacher has built on the school's many strengths identified in its previous inspection. He has enriched the school's culture of respect for all and positive relationships, summarised succinctly in 'Do your best and be nice.' The great majority of pupils work hard. Many parents' written comments during the inspection included references to how much pupils enjoy school life and how happy they are.
- Another parent observed that the school had provided her child with 'amazing life skills' along with building up confidence and self-esteem. The school's provision to prepare pupils for their future lives is outstanding. Numerous stimulating topics are considered in learning about life lessons and form time. Topics include spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues and British values, alongside practical knowledge about health and finance, for example.
- An appreciation of democracy in action is witnessed by the elected school council's work. Members of the council told an inspector how senior staff respond to issues they raise. Pupils appreciate being involved in staff appointments. A Kindness Council promotes acts of kindness as well as considering which pupils deserve recognition for kindness to others.
- The two loyal, experienced deputy headteachers know the school inside out. They, together with other very competent members of the strong and effective leadership team, support the headteacher extremely well. Practically all middle leaders are efficient and work collaboratively to keep improving pupils' outcomes. Underpinning the smooth running of the school's daily life are many caring and diligent support, management and administration staff.
- Governors and all staff promote positive relationships combined with high aspirations for themselves and pupils. All staff experience well-organised, high-quality training for their professional development, often sharing their own good practice with others. The few staff questionnaire responses were extremely positive, especially about enjoying working at the school.
- When the headteacher took up post three years ago, he analysed pupils' progress in different subjects and by their levels of achievement on entry to the school. He successfully supported the English department to match pupils' progress in English language to that in mathematics. He also correctly identified that low and middle attainers particularly were not doing as well as they should. As a result of effective strategies to improve the quality of teaching, their progress improved. The school's evaluation of its strengths and areas for improvement is accurate and realistic.
- All senior leaders know that some of the most able pupils, around half the school's intake, have the potential to achieve even better outcomes. A strong focus on improving these pupils' learning has already started, in all years. Well-written documents have been written for all pupils in Years 10 and 11, for example 'How to get A\*/A grades.'
- At the same time, a member of staff responsible for disadvantaged pupils' progress is driving up rates of progress for this group. The special educational needs coordinator

continues to give high-quality advice which strengthens teachers' skills in supporting these pupils' individual needs. Referring to class summaries of 'pupils' passports', which include pupils' comments on what helps them to learn well, teachers then tailor a style of question, for example, to match their needs.

- The school allocates additional government funding thoughtfully and effectively for both academic and pastoral support. These funds support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and catch-up pupils in Year 7. Reviews of the actions that generated the most improvement lead to subtle changes to the next year's spending; the positive impact of how funds are spent increases each year.
- The curriculum is adjusted and evolves every year, reflecting the recent increase in the proportion of most-able pupils joining the school. It now combines a wide range of academic and work-related subjects including and beyond those required for the EBacc qualification. Pupils are also encouraged to participate in community activities to give wider breadth to their experiences, and empathy for others on some occasions.
- At the same time, to make sure pupils achieve the grades they need for the next stage of their education, the headteacher encourages pupils to take the best pathways for them. These could be a mix of practical and academic qualifications, taking less than 10 subjects or ones which are not counted in the school's progress measures. In 2016, almost all Year 11 pupils proceeded to further education or apprenticeships, which is well above the national figure.
- A parent observed that pupils 'can individually excel in areas suited to them', which is certainly the case as there are numerous extra-curricular activities, trips and enrichment activities. The well-used sports facilities, including 28 acres of playing fields and an all-weather pitch, mean pupils participate in many sports ranging from football to trampolining. Other activities include Duke of Edinburgh, a coding club, choir, model-making and cooking plus extra subjects such as Latin and finance.
- The school liaises well with parents. More than a quarter of parents completed Parent View, of whom 95% would recommend the school to others. A very recent similar school questionnaire, completed by more parents, asks for their names so that a senior member of staff can contact them to discuss any concerns they raise.
- During the inspection over 300 parents submitted written comments, over 85% of which praised different aspects of the school's work. No single concern emerged from the other ones, which included comments on teaching, behaviour, homework, uniform and reports. Inspectors are confident that senior leaders and governors do discuss and respond to parents' worries.

### **Governance of the school**

- Sussex Learning Trust's governors and the school's governors are extremely experienced and dedicated to the school's success. They bring a wealth of relevant experience and wisdom to their meetings. They know exactly what is happening and what is not quite as strong as they and senior leaders would wish. They are rightly confident that they 'never tread water'. They examine how additional funds are spent carefully and evaluate their effectiveness. They are proud of how quickly pastoral support is put in place for any pupil needing it.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors and senior leaders make sure that safeguarding training and procedures are fully up to date and followed rigorously. Records of the rare safeguarding incidents are meticulous and risk assessments are detailed. Staff regularly discuss any concerns they have with the child protection officer, who contacts the local authority immediately if needed. The school does not shy away from making referrals to the local authority when there are concerns about a pupil's welfare or about websites pupils access outside school; it has also contacted the police about 'Prevent' concerns.
- Staff are fully aware of the 'Prevent' duty law, which is included as part of their regular safeguarding training. However, from talking to pupils it emerged that they had limited understanding of radicalisation and extremism, suggesting they are not yet familiar with these words although they discuss related elements within the learning about life programme.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which they use to outline the purpose of lessons well and to make explanations clear. They employ a wide range of stimulating resources to make learning interesting. Supporting the school's focus on extending pupils' literacy, many teachers make a point of stressing subject-specific vocabulary.
- Every pupil now has a tablet (with blocked websites as necessary). Use of this technology contributes to much successful learning. Pupils use them sensibly, find them very helpful and say they make learning enjoyable and interesting.
- In English, for example, pupils photographed their written work in English and then shared it with others for discussion. In graphics, Year 11 pupils could quickly check the structure of their course and store their work online.
- Pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11, often discuss work together enthusiastically, explaining it to each other and sharing ideas and support. This approach frequently generates improved understanding, confidence and progress. Teachers circulate during these discussions and help those who need extra explanations and guidance.
- Teaching support assistants provide helpful and encouraging additional guidance for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They know when to guide pupils and when it is best to encourage their independence. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Practically all teachers assess the quality of work accurately. The school is already developing the interpretation of these assessments in order to pinpoint and take action more precisely for pupils who are underachieving.
- In some subjects and classes, however, the questions posed to pupils do not challenge them to think deeply and, for example, justify or elaborate on their responses. This can limit understanding and reflection on the work that pupils, especially the most able ones, are tackling in lessons.
- A minority of teachers do not adhere to the school's marking policy. Some books include regular, helpful comments and advice but others do not, or important subject-

specific words spelt incorrectly are not corrected. For a few pupils this can hold back their progress. Parents observed that the regularity and quality of homework is variable, and inspectors' examination of pupils' books confirms this to be the case.

- Historically, English literature outcomes were not as strong as those in language because the latter had been a high priority. A new subject leader and new members of the department have given pupils better skills for them to enjoy and interpret literature. The librarian successfully encourages pupils to use the well-resourced library to extend their reading skills and enjoyment of books.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Outstanding

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. This work includes highly effective provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, whether registered in the main school or in the SSC.
- Leaders focus on pupils' self-confidence, physical and emotional well-being even before they enter Year 7. Staff visit all the primary feeder schools to meet the Year 6 pupils and learn about their individual circumstances and interests. In Year 8, a small group of vulnerable pupils attend a weekly Forest School session where, for example, the science of combustion is explained, with reference to fire. Pupils were captivated learning in the natural environment because 'we do more than write all the time!'
- Case studies, describing the support offered to individual pupils, confirm that staff do everything possible to overcome factors reducing pupils' happiness and success at school. External agencies and the school's trained support staff fully address pupils' medical or personal issues. A social worker, thanking staff for their work with one pupil, wrote: 'It will, without doubt, have had a hugely positive impact on this pupil's future.'
- Pupils' knowledge and awareness of how to lead safe and healthy lives is equally important for staff, whether it relates to e-safety (particularly using modern technology in school), the dangers of social media and drugs, or first aid. Pupils learn about different beliefs and lifestyles, homophobia and respect for all.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. With excellent pastoral care, it is not surprising that pupils feel settled and keen to learn and join in all the school has to offer. Their behaviour is predominantly exemplary and they concentrate well in lessons. Highly positive relationships between teachers and pupils, and among pupils themselves, are respectful and reflect the school's keen focus on all members of the community being kind and considerate.
- In a recent questionnaire carried out by the school, over half the parents could not comment on bullying because they had not heard of any; practically all the rest agreed that the school deals with it effectively. Pupils confirmed these views, and the school's recorded incidents of bullying are few and far between. The same is true for incidents of racist comments.
- Less than one in five pupils completed the inspection questionnaire but their responses were predominantly positive. None disagreed with several statements about the school

encouraging them 'to treat everyone equally' and 'to be independent and to take on responsibilities'.

- Pupils attending off-site training, including those following blended learning, make good progress in their personal development and behaviour because their placements are carefully chosen to match their welfare and learning needs. Feedback from placement providers refers to pupils 'getting on well', 'being polite and enthusiastic' or 'doing well with practical tasks'.
- Attendance has improved in the last three years to match the national average in the last academic year. However, staff struggle to reduce the high or persistent absence of some disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders check rigorously that everything possible is done to liaise with parents and to support pupils' attendance, especially those who are school refusers. So far this year, information shows that the school is having some success.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- In 2016, four out of five pupils were entered for the components of the EBacc qualification: English, mathematics, two sciences, a language and history or geography. Over half of them attained grade C or above in all five subject areas. Both proportions were well above those seen nationally.
- Pupils in all years, particularly the majority of those who enter the school with average attainment, continue to make at least good, and sometimes outstanding, progress in the EBacc subjects. The percentage of pupils attaining GCSE grade C or higher in both English and mathematics increased from 69% in 2014 to 82% in 2016.
- In several (non-EBacc) GCSE subjects such as religious studies, art, design technology, business studies and physical education, pupils attained well above average results. However, pupils did not do so well in a few other GCSE and work-related subjects (some of which are no longer being taught). These results, along with a range of complex calculation factors, lowered the school's overall effectiveness measure (known as 'Progress 8'), disguising some of the outstanding achievements described in the first two bullet points above.
- Also not evident in 2016 headline figures is that the small number of disadvantaged pupils, and some of the most able pupils, did not make as strong progress as other groups of pupils. Leaders know that outcomes will not be outstanding until all pupils make nearly the same progress; work towards this is already evident in several subjects and classes.
- The most able Year 11 pupils achieved an above-average percentage of high GCSE grades in 2016 but, from their starting points, the percentage should be even higher. Based on provisional figures, however, they made more progress than the same pupils nationally in the humanities subjects.
- The differences between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that of all pupils have diminished in recent years, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Maintaining a non-existent or small difference in Years 10 and 11 is senior leaders' top priority. The deployment of staff with light timetables to support these pupils, booster classes for those pupils not studying a language, mentors, and revision master classes for Year 11 are examples of

the many successful interventions used.

- Pupils who enter the school with low reading ages make rapid progress to catch up. Last year, all Year 7 pupils who started school with reading ages of eight years made the equivalent of two years' progress in one year.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities registered in the SSC or main school make at least good progress in all years, reflected in some strong results by those in Year 11. A senior local authority visitor recently praised the 'successful holistic approach maximising achievement for all pupils in the centre and the wider school'.

## School details

|                         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Unique reference number | 137416      |
| Local authority         | West Sussex |
| Inspection number       | 10024796    |

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   |
| School category                     | Academy converter   |
| Age range of pupils                 | 11 to 16  |
| Gender of pupils                    | Mixed   |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1,484   |
| Appropriate authority               | The governing body  |
| Chair                               | Jonathan Ash-Edwards  |
| Headteacher                         | Jonathan Morris   |
| Telephone number                    | 01444 457881  |
| Website                             | <a href="http://www.wardenpark.co.uk">http://www.wardenpark.co.uk</a> |
| Email address                       | <a href="mailto:admin@wardenpark.co.uk">admin@wardenpark.co.uk</a>    |
| Date of previous inspection         | 1–2 February 2012   |

## Information about this school

- The Sussex Learning Trust name evolved from the original trust which took the school's name when it became an academy in 2011. It was joined by a local primary school. The trust now wishes to expand and increase its partnership and work with other schools. Plans to achieve this are underway.
- The headteacher of the school is also the chief executive of the trust and is a national leader of education. His expertise is shared between Warden Park and the primary school and he will also contribute to the development of schools joining the trust in the future.
- The school is much larger than the average secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The SSC provides for 18 pupils assessed as having severe specific learning difficulties, speech and language needs and additional learning needs. The centre is funded by the local authority.

- Pupils registered in the SSC are fully integrated into school life, learning and participating in mainstream lessons with support. They also receive additional support from the school's SCC specialist staff, to help them to be successful.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well below average.
- Around 40 pupils in Year 7 are eligible for catch-up funding (for those who did not attain the nationally expected standards in reading, writing or mathematics at the end of primary school).
- Close to nine out of 10 pupils are White British with very small numbers of pupils from several minority ethnic groups. A below-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- Off-site training is made available for around 10 pupils in Years 10 and 11 to extend their learning experience. The school offers the following training at:
  - Brinsbury Agricultural College, which provides full-time and day 'fresh start' courses, sometimes blended with work experience
  - West Sussex Alternative Provision College, which provides full-time attendance but most pupils follow 'blended learning' courses where they study at home and a tutor visits them
  - Plumpton College, where pupils attend day courses on agriculture.
- 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.
- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in many classrooms. Most of their observations were for a short time so that many subjects and classes were visited. Several of the lessons were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed several form time sessions at the beginning of the day and attended two assemblies.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' books both in and outside of lessons and heard some pupils reading. They met pupils informally as they visited parts of the school during breaktimes. They also held meetings with pupils from several year groups, and met some of the most able pupils, members of the school council and some school ambassadors.
- Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders and the special educational needs coordinator who leads the provision for the SSC. The lead inspector met with the chair of the Sussex Learning Trust (also the chair of the school's governing body) and three other governors.
- Inspectors took account of 23 responses to a questionnaire completed by staff and 47 responses to a questionnaire completed by pupils. The online questionnaire (Parent View) was completed by 326 parents, and 317 parents also summarised their views on a free text site to which many of them added written comments.

## Inspection team

|                               |                         |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Clare Gillies, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Steve Baker                   | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Alan Powell                   | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Peter Swan                    | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Peter Rodin                   | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Lizzie Jeanes                 | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Krista Dawkins                | Ofsted Inspector        |
| Lee Selby                     | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Kathryn Moles                 | Her Majesty's 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](http://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings).

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