

Sir William Romney's School

Lowfield Road, Tetbury, Gloucestershire GL8 8AE

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| Inspection dates | 23–24 February 2016 |
| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Under the dynamic leadership of the headteacher, the school is making good progress. He provides a clear direction for the school and is ably assisted by a highly effective senior leadership team.
- Middle leaders are now a strength of the school. They are at the heart of improvements the school is making in the quality of education.
- Outcomes overall for pupils in all years are good. Many are now making rapid progress as they move through the school.
- The performance of disadvantaged pupils is improving rapidly and the gap between their achievement and that of other pupils is narrowing.
- The overall quality of teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and delivered. The school's approach to assessment and marking allows pupils to clearly understand what they have done well and how to do even better.
- Pupils are very polite and conduct themselves around the school site safely. Most pupils display very positive attitudes to learning and clearly want to do well. There is relatively little disruptive behaviour in lessons and when it occurs, it is usually dealt with well by teachers.
- The school looks after its pupils very well. Pupils and their parents feel that it is a very safe place in which children can thrive.
- Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their lives. Almost all those who leave after Year 11 go on to meaningful and sustained education, employment or training.
- Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas that it needs to develop. They provide strong support for the school's leaders but also challenge them to improve the school further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The level of challenge for pupils of all abilities, but especially the most able, is not always as high as it could be and this can slow down their progress.
- Absence and persistent absence are too high.
- Exclusion rates are too high.
- The effectiveness with which the school's assessment and marking policy is used by teachers to help pupils make progress is variable.
- Outcomes for pupils are not consistently high enough across all subjects.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for pupils further by ensuring that all teachers:
 - provide a consistently high level of challenge, particularly for the most able
 - use the opportunities provided by the school's marking and feedback policy to encourage pupils to reflect even more productively on what they can already do and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve attendance and reduce exclusions, including for disadvantaged pupils, those with special educational needs or disability and those who join the school after Year 7.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher provides dynamic and clear-sighted leadership of the school. He is resolute in demanding the best of both pupils and staff and this has led to rapid improvements since the last inspection. In this drive to make Sir William Romney's a better school, he is very ably supported by highly effective senior leaders who share his focused and determined approach. Together they form a tightly knit team devoted to securing the best for the pupils in their care. Parents are very aware of the high quality of the school's leadership. Every single one of the respondents to the online survey of parents' opinions agrees that the school is well led and states that they would recommend the school to another parent. Such unanimity is unusual.
- The middle leaders in the school are now a real strength and this, too, marks a notable improvement since the last inspection. The leaders of learning, those in charge of particular subject groups, are having a very significant impact on improving the quality of teaching in the school and, thus, on outcomes for pupils, even though many are relatively new in post. They are at the heart of the management of teachers' performance.
- Continuing professional development is well led at both senior and middle levels and it is resolutely focused on improving teaching. Newly qualified teachers are well supported through their induction period. Nonetheless, there are still variations in the quality of teaching overall.
- School leaders, at both senior and middle levels, have a clear understanding of the strengths of teaching in the school and the areas that need developing. This was demonstrated in a number of joint observations with inspectors in lessons across a range of subjects and year groups.
- Teachers' movement up the pay scales is clearly linked to pupils' progress and is closely monitored by school leaders and governors. As part of the management of their performance, all teachers have at least one annual target that relates specifically to the progress that pupils make.
- The curriculum is well designed and meets the needs of the pupils. While broadly academic in nature, it does cater for pupils for whom more vocational courses are appropriate. For a school of its size, Sir William Romney's offers an impressive range of opportunities for pupils to acquire new knowledge, develop greater understanding and learn new skills. Similarly, the school offers a very wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and trips, from ukulele or pottery clubs to trips to the First World War battlefields, Africa or Borneo. These are very popular with pupils and participation rates are high. Taken together, these curricular and extra-curricular opportunities have a very positive impact on pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- The school does promote fundamental British values through the curriculum, registration periods and assemblies but, as the school's honest self-evaluation acknowledges, it could do more to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. Similarly, the school's work to keep pupils safe from radicalisation and extremism is at an early stage.
- The school uses the pupil premium, additional funding provided by the government for disadvantaged pupils, well. It evaluates clearly what it has done with this money and can demonstrate how it is having a very positive effect on the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The school makes use of the catch-up funding for Year 7 pupils who enter the school with low levels of numeracy or literacy but it does not analyse its impact closely enough. As a consequence, the effectiveness with which such funding is used is less clear.
- There are still areas that school leaders need to address before Sir William Romney's can aspire to be an outstanding school. Absence remains stubbornly high despite the fact that the school has put a great deal of time, effort and resources into improving it. It is particularly high for certain groups of pupils, such as those in receipt of the pupil premium or those with special educational needs or disability. In addition, the substantial number of pupils who arrive in the school after Year 7 also have a high absence rate. Rates of exclusion for these groups are also high, notwithstanding the fact that many such pupils arrive at the school with long-standing, complex needs. Leaders are aware of all this and are determined to tackle these issues successfully.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are demonstrably committed to the school and securing the best for its pupils. They carry out their duty of oversight well and are clearly involved in setting the strategic direction of the school and monitoring its progress. For example, the governors are closely involved in establishing the overall

approach to the use of the pupil premium to help improve the life chances of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Governors, however, are less clear on some other aspects of the school's work, such as the use of catch-up funding for those pupils who enter Year 7 with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

- Governors have a clear vision for the future direction of the school. Their three-year development plan aimed at making Sir William Romney's the local school of choice contains ambitious but realistic targets. They are aware of what the school needs to do in order to achieve this goal and are providing the head with a good level of support while still challenging the school to achieve more, for example, by improving outcomes for pupils or raising attendance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The headteacher has taken on the role of designated safeguarding lead and this has been part of the success with which the school has established a genuine culture of safeguarding. Checks on teachers are carried out thoroughly and recorded appropriately. Pupils feel safe at school and know whom to turn to if they have a problem. All parents agree that their children are safe in the school. As one parent remarked, the school 'provides a safe, secure and inspirational environment for my children to learn'.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching in the school is typically good and is characterised by effective planning, skilful delivery and accurate assessment. Most teachers have a clear understanding of what pupils can and cannot do and use this to plan lessons and the activities in them effectively. Pupils are enabled thereby to acquire new knowledge, understanding and skills that allow them to make good progress across a range of subjects.
- In some lessons, the level of challenge is high and pupils rise to that challenge. In English in Year 10, for example, pupils were able to give insightful and developed responses to Dickens's *Great Expectations* using sophisticated vocabulary. In other lessons, however, a high level of challenge was not so obvious, especially for the most able. Too often, extension activities for these pupils appear to have been tagged onto activities more suitable for pupils of lower ability.
- Most teachers make effective use of the school's marking and assessment policy to enable pupils to understand what they do well and what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils spoke positively about how the school's policy of allowing them time to reflect upon and revisit work helped them to make progress and could talk articulately about how that process worked. While virtually all teachers are now following the marking policy, there is a variation in the effectiveness with which it is used. In English it is exemplary, but in some other subjects, the use of marking and feedback in line with the policy is patchier.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively in lessons, especially where the teaching assistant is permanently linked to a particular department, as is seen in science. The special educational needs coordinator works well with teaching assistants to develop their work with individual pupils.
- The school sets regular homework which increases in frequency and duration as pupils move through the school. Thus, by the time pupils reach Key Stage 4 they are receiving homework of up to one hour and 20 minutes' duration every day. This homework helps to consolidate pupils' learning and prepares them to make further progress.
- The school keeps parents well informed about their children's progress and the vast majority of parents who responded to the online survey say that they value the information they receive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school cares very well for its pupils and the pupils and parents recognise this. Pupils speak highly of how teachers help them and the lengths to which they go to do so. As one parent said, 'there have been several teachers who went beyond expectations to support and encourage our daughter and to respond sensitively when she needed help'.
- Most pupils are mature and self-confident learners who want to do as well as they can. They rise to the challenge of good teaching and even when teaching is less than inspiring, most of them continue to

display positive attitudes to learning, although on such occasions a few pupils do lose focus.

- Pupils can talk articulately about how the school helps them to look after their physical and emotional health. They also know how to stay safe in a variety of situations, including online. They say that there is little or no bullying but are confident that if it were to occur that the school would deal with it quickly and effectively.
- Pupils take pride in their work and the school's walls are covered in fine examples of this, especially pupils' art work. Nonetheless, standards of presentation in pupils' books are variable and could, in some cases, be much better.
- The school provides high-quality careers information, advice and guidance. This is highly valued by pupils, particularly those in Year 11 who feel very well prepared for the next stage of their education or training. The extremely low number of pupils who do not go on to sustained education, employment or training is testament to the success of the school's work in this area.
- Pupils demonstrate, in both their behaviour and the way they speak, a respect for others with different backgrounds or lifestyles. Pupils who join the school after Year 7 are made to feel very welcome. Pupils also spoke about how the school had addressed the use of derogatory language successfully. This is a clear example of how the school promotes equality of opportunity and diversity.
- The Phoenix Room provides pupils experiencing difficulties of any sort with important emotional support.
- For those pupils who use alternative provision, it is having a positive impact on their personal development and improving their attendance.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils conduct themselves very well around the school and wear their uniform smartly. They are friendly, polite to each other and courteous to visitors, readily offering to help them find their way about the school site, for example.
- In surveys, the vast majority of staff and parents believe that behaviour is at least good and pupils also agree that most of the time behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. There is some low-level disruption in lessons on occasions but most teachers and teaching assistants deal with this effectively and without fuss.
- Levels of attendance are rising but absence and persistent absence, particularly among key groups such as disadvantaged pupils or those with special educational needs or disability, are still stubbornly high. In addition, the attendance of pupils who join the school after Year 7 is also lower than that of other pupils. The school uses a full-time educational welfare officer and an inclusion officer to work with pupils with high rates of absence and this work is having some impact. Moreover, there is a small number of very poor attenders that, in a small school, is having a disproportionate impact on overall rates of attendance.
- Rates of fixed-term and permanent exclusions are higher than the national average. While the school does have high standards for behaviour and caters for a number of pupils with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties, these rates of exclusion are still too high. School leaders are aware of this and understand the importance of tackling this situation if the school is to continue to improve.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Outcomes for pupils in all year groups and across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, are good. The school has very robust tracking systems and its assessments of progress across the year groups can be confidently relied upon as accurate. These systems show that, in terms of progress from their starting points, pupils in all year groups are now making good progress overall compared with other pupils with the same starting points nationally. Notwithstanding this, however, progress in particular subject areas can vary; it is not as strong, for example, in modern foreign languages as it is in English.
- While attainment of five passes at A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, at GCSE in 2015 was at the national average for all schools, this actually represents a significant achievement in terms of the progress made by pupils, given their below-average starting points. A similar pattern of rapid progress from low starting points is now seen in all the current year groups in the school from Year 7 upwards.
- Historic published information would suggest that the gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others, either in the school or nationally, are large. It is clear from more up-to-date

information, however, that these gaps are closing rapidly and that disadvantaged pupils are now making much faster progress than before. Their progress is now very close to that of other pupils in the school with the same starting points.

- Similarly, the historic underperformance of the most-able pupils has been addressed and they are now making good progress, albeit not as rapidly as middle- or lower ability pupils.
- The progress of other key groups, however, is not as strong. While pupils with special educational needs make progress, they do so at a slower rate than others, as do those pupils who join the school at times other than at the start of Year 7, of whom there are substantial numbers.
- There is a structured programme in the school which encourages pupils to read but it is not clear from the school's information what impact this is having on the frequency or fluency of children's reading.
- The outcomes achieved by pupils allow them, virtually without exception, to progress to the next stage of their lives, be it sustained education, employment or training. Evidence on pupils' destinations after Year 11 indicates that those who stay in education go on to courses of an appropriate level for the qualifications they have attained.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 136985 |
| Local authority | Gloucestershire |
| Inspection number | 10008192 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 425 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Roslyn Goodwin |
| Headteacher | Steven Mackay |
| Telephone number | 01666 502378 |
| Website | www.swr.gloucs.sch.uk |
| Email address | admin@swr.gloucs.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 6–7 February 2014 |

Information about this school

- Sir William Romney’s School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It became an academy in 2011.
- It has below-average proportions of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who speak English as an additional language. The pupils are predominantly from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils with either a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is higher than the national average.
- The school is undersubscribed and as a consequence a large number of its pupils join at times other than at the start of Year 7. By the time a cohort reaches Year 11, as many as 20% of pupils will have joined in this manner.
- The school uses one alternative provider, Stroud College.
- The school meets the government’s floor standards for GCSE results, which set the minimum expectations for pupils’ attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors undertook observations in 30 lessons across all year groups and a wide range of subjects. A substantial number of these observations were undertaken jointly with members of the school's senior and middle leadership. Inspectors also visited registration groups and attended an assembly. During observations in lessons, the opportunity was taken to scrutinise pupils' work.
- Inspectors had discussions with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and other members of staff. The lead inspector met with the Chair of the Governing Body and the chair of the governors' resources committee. He also spoke to the school's improvement partner via telephone. Inspectors had discussions with pupils from all year groups.
- A wide range of documentary evidence was scrutinised, including the school's own self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, minutes of governors' meetings, records of assessments of pupils' work and information about their progress. Documents relating to safeguarding and child protection were also checked, as were the school's records of the checks it makes on teachers.
- In making their judgements, inspectors took into account 57 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. They also took into account 49 responses to the online staff questionnaire and 30 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

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