

Meopham School

Wrotham Road, Meopham, Gravesend, Kent DA13 0AH

Inspection dates

22–23 January 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders have created a purposeful and nurturing environment where all collaborate to provide excellence in pupils' academic and pastoral learning, development and outcomes.
- Swale Academies Trust has provided well-considered strategic and operational support. This has helped school leaders at all levels to develop well. These leaders now support colleagues at other trust schools.
- Pupils in key stages 3 and 4 make excellent progress across the curriculum. Standards in English, mathematics and science are particularly impressive.
- GCSE results over the past three years show that pupils consistently make better progress than typical.
- Leaders from the school and the trust have provided excellent support to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school is outstanding. The common lesson structure provides a strong framework in which teachers are supported to innovate and match activities to the needs of their pupils.
- Much teaching is inspirational. Teachers make excellent use of technical language and expert questioning. They support pupils' social and emotional development very well through careful coaching and encouragement.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They demonstrate a joy in learning, being eager to participate in lessons and explain their ideas. They enjoy school and the vast majority are rarely absent.
- Pupils are respectful, articulate and considerate of each other. They benefit from the whole-school promotion of oracy.
- Safeguarding arrangements are strong and staff are well-trained. Pupils have a secure understanding of how to recognise and deal with potential risks.
- Pupils are rightly proud of the inclusive culture of the school. They feel secure and say that there is always a member of staff to talk to.
- Pupils in the resource-based provision make excellent progress from their starting points. Many attain GCSE qualifications in line with other pupils nationally.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance is highly effective. It supports pupils to be successful in their next steps.
- Sixth-form provision is good. Students make good progress, but this is not as strong as that of pupils lower in the school. The 16 to 19 curriculum offer is currently limited, so it does not cater for all the pupils who would like to stay after Year 11.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve outcomes and the curriculum for students in the sixth form so that they are of a similar high quality to those in the rest of the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- School leaders, supported very well by the trust, have worked tirelessly to successfully establish an exceptional team of staff who share leaders' vision for excellence in every aspect of the school. All who are involved with Meopham School have worked highly effectively together to sustain and develop the rapid school improvement that started when the trust took responsibility for the school in 2013.
- A sense of calm determination and purpose pervades the school. Everyone knows that they are there to create successful futures for their pupils. Leaders' relentless focus on 'character education' has ensured that pupils' impressive academic progress is supported by their wider pastoral development.
- At the heart of the success of the school is the headteacher. She inspires and supports her team to keep innovating and improving processes in the best interests of pupils. She ensures that highly effective systems promote continual improvement and support teachers to provide the best quality of education for pupils.
- Staff are highly motivated. They reflect the passion for learning that is expressed by leaders. Staff feel empowered by leaders and identify the continual professional development that they contribute to and participate in as being fundamental to the school's success. They appreciate the ways that leaders address teachers' workload, including the reduction in administrative tasks that do not have a direct link to safeguarding or to pupils' progress. Those new to the profession are supported exceptionally well as they start their careers.
- Leaders at all levels are highly effective in their roles. They have a clarity of purpose that helps them to identify how their actions are successful, and therefore how to refine and improve initiatives even more. Leaders share ideas and strategies across the school and with other trust schools. This has been hugely successful. The very small proportion of subjects with less strong progress have benefited from this work, and pupils' progress has increased as a consequence.
- Provision for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is highly effective and the progress that these pupils make from their starting points is impressive. Leaders know these pupils and their families exceptionally well, ensuring that aspiration is high and any barriers to success are addressed.
- Additional funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is used very well. These pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points. Those who attend the specially resourced provision for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) receive excellent care. Staff adjust provision for these pupils thoughtfully. They provide excellent support so that pupils meet their individual targets and attain very highly.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum in key stages 3 and 4 is broad and balanced, and meets pupils' needs exceptionally well. The proportion of pupils who are studying the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate continues to rise. The formal curriculum is enhanced by 'advisories' where pupils can benefit from revisiting learning

and/or explore additional aspects of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.

- Work to develop 'character education' and pupils' oracy is striking. These aspects of learning are threaded through the day-to-day curriculum and are impressively successful. Pupils are thoughtful, articulate and considered. They relish explaining their ideas, using technical vocabulary with precision.
- Leaders are acutely aware that the range of subjects and qualifications offered in the sixth form is currently limited. However, leaders have ensured that the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme are met in full and students are well-supported to succeed with their next steps. Plans to extend the sixth form offer are well considered and leaders, rightly, see this as a priority.
- Leaders have responded with imagination and determination to address staffing challenges and ensure that pupils still receive learning that properly matches their needs. The trust has supported leaders very well, for example by facilitating 'drop down days' for technology projects.
- Leaders have also ensured that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) learning is exceptionally high quality and embedded throughout their school experience.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their praise for the school and all it does. Typical comments mention, 'the wonderful educational experience' and the way that the staff 'are helping my son to flourish'.

Governance of the school

- The trust scrutinises the work of school leaders closely and provides strategic and operational leadership support as is required. The mentoring, training and support provided for school leaders have been very successful and the trust has moved to a more strategic oversight and governance role.
- The trust makes good use of expertise from its schools. For example, the trust helped leaders to reduce the impact of recruitment difficulties by sharing subject expertise. Trust-wide professional development activities and opportunities are valued by staff.
- The trust holds leaders to account well and ensures that additional funding, including that for disadvantaged pupils, is used effectively.
- The local governing body has strengthened since the appointment of a new chair. Governors have a clear understanding of their role and they scrutinise the work of the school carefully. Governors provide useful suggestions, asking pertinent questions about their areas of responsibility. They communicate their findings to the trust and check that recommendations are acted on.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff throughout the school are very clear about their responsibilities and the need to be constantly vigilant. They have a

strong understanding of safeguarding issues, including local priorities, and how to respond to them.

- Leaders have ensured that the processes for checking the suitability of adults to work with pupils are followed carefully and recorded meticulously. Records are checked routinely by the executive headteacher and governors.
- Leaders have created a supportive and inclusive culture where pupils feel secure that there is always someone to talk to and who can help sort out any worries. Pupils and parents were very positive about the 'pastoral team' and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) group who proactively promote equality. They also like the 'text line' so that they can report any worries out of school time.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching overall is inspirational, fuelling pupils' desire to learn and to demonstrate their learning. Across the school and in different subjects, pupils delighted in explaining their learning to inspectors. For example, a pupil proudly identified 'intersecting transversal lines' in mathematics and explained why this term was correct.
- A vivid sense of cooperation and purpose permeates the school. Pupils support each other impressively during learning activities and are happy to show their enjoyment of learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the school. Pupils share teachers' high expectations and are keen to learn. Their impeccable behaviour supports their learning.
- Teachers have expert subject knowledge and use this to structure learning activities carefully so that pupils make rapid progress. Pupils enjoy the 'stretch and challenge' activities that are always available, although they understand that it is more important to 'properly get' an aspect of learning before moving on to the next step.
- Teachers insist on correct technical terminology and precision from pupils. This combines with the whole-school oracy focus to support pupils to articulate their ideas exceptionally well. This approach also helps those pupils who are stuck on a concept to identify which part they need more help with. There is a clear recognition that asking for help is part of the whole learning process. Pupils like the red, amber and green cards that are used consistently well across the school to identify confidence with learning.
- Staff and pupils are very positive about the 'house style' that provides a standard structure for lessons. They like the consistency of lesson structure and the way that staff are encouraged to innovate and take risks within this agreed approach.
- Teachers use questioning exceptionally well to support and further pupils' learning. The coaching style that they adopt helps pupils to make progress and grow in self-esteem as they rise to the challenge of working out answers for themselves.
- Pupils who attend the specially resourced provision are integrated well into mainstream lessons and learning activities. Teaching assistants provide these pupils with additional help, given with a lightness of touch that makes it highly successful.

- Homework is carefully planned so that it supports pupils' learning very well. Pupils are positive about the range of activities that homework includes, seeing it as a valuable extension of their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are self-confident and focused. They understand that sometimes getting stuck with learning is part of being a successful learner. Consequently, they support each other exceptionally well and demonstrate respect in lessons and around the school as a whole.
- Pupils know how to identify risk and have a vast array of strategies to keep themselves safe, including when online. They have a good understanding of the world beyond the school thanks to the 'character education' programme embedded through the curriculum. This, alongside 'advisories' and assemblies, promotes pupils' SMSC and PSHE development exceptionally well. Pupils deal with highly challenging topics such as female genital mutilation with maturity and calm reflection.
- Pupils are, rightly, proud of the inclusive values of the school. They are friendly and celebrate diversity. They report that racism and homophobia are rare. They attribute this to the school values of inclusion and the very active LGBT ambassador group made up of pupils and staff.
- Careers education, information, advice and guidance is very effective and supports pupils to make informed choices and move to their next steps successfully.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils share a positive sense of collaboration and purpose which translates into impeccable behaviour. They exhibit joy in learning, arriving at lessons in an orderly fashion and ready to learn.
- Pupils also behave very well around the school. For example, pupils organise themselves into teams to play football at break- and lunchtimes and self-regulate the lunch queue. Staff enjoy talking with pupils during these times rather than having to formally manage their behaviour.
- Attendance remains above national figures. Leaders' work to support the small number of pupils who were persistently absent has been successful. Staff remain proactive and determined to support pupils to keep their attendance high.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils make exceptional progress and achieve very well as a result of the teaching and pastoral support that they receive. The provisional 2018 GCSE examinations indicate that overall, as with previous years, pupils made much better progress than nationally.

- School information and scrutiny of pupils' books show that pupils' progress continues to rise, including the progress of disadvantaged pupils and high-prior-attaining pupils. Where pupils' progress is not as high in a very small minority of subjects, it is improving rapidly due to support from leaders and the trust specialists.
- Progress and attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is exceptionally strong across the school.
- Pupils with SEND make impressive progress from their starting points. The personalised curriculum and specialist support they receive supports their excellent outcomes against their targets and in GCSE examinations.
- Disadvantaged pupils make better progress overall than pupils in other schools due to the high-quality teaching and support that they receive.
- Pupils who join the school with lower standards in literacy and numeracy are given good-quality help to catch up. All pupils benefit from the high profile that oracy is given across the school.
- By the end of Year 11, pupils are exceptionally well prepared for the next stages in their learning. They receive excellent careers education, including independent expert advice, that supports them to make successful transitions to post-16 education, training or employment.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Students in the sixth form make good progress. Historically, they make stronger progress in applied general subjects than in academic subjects. Current students are making good progress overall, but this is not as rapid as that of pupils in the rest of the school.
- The leadership of the sixth form is good and the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes are met in full. However, the curriculum offer is limited to a narrow selection of subjects, so it does not cater for all Meopham pupils who would like to stay into the sixth form. Leaders are acutely aware of this and trying hard to balance a good quality of provision with the economic challenges of small classes.
- Students' examination studies are supported very well with a range of non-qualification learning such as employability skills, financial education and work experience. Students are very happy with the support they receive, including from an independent careers advisor and from their personal tutors. Retention rates have improved and are now much higher than typical.
- Students' behaviour is excellent, and they display excellent attitudes to learning. The values found in the rest of the school continue deeply through the sixth form. Students display courtesy and respect, supporting each other well in lessons and around the school. For example, groups of students worked together very well to analyse and evaluate interview techniques, challenging each other's ideas with precision and thought, thereby moving the learning on quickly.
- Lessons are calm and purposeful, and teaching is effective. Teachers make good use of the learning structures that are embedded throughout the whole school. The strengths

in questioning and technical language are continued in sixth form lessons. Expectations are high.

- The very small number of students who need to retake their mathematics GCSE qualification receive good support to do so and do well.
- Pastoral care is excellent, and students benefit from a strong programme of tutorials that supports students well at an age-appropriate level. Students enjoy school and recognise the progress they are making. Leaders ensure that the effective safeguarding arrangements in the school overall include the sixth form. Students have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe from risk. Their attendance is excellent.

School details

Unique reference number	139075
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10054150

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

Type of school	Secondary (non-selective)
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	627
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	38
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Paul Goodson
Headteacher	Suzanne Dickinson
Telephone number	01474 814646
Website	http://meopham.kent.sch.uk
Email address	meopham@meopham.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 February 2018

Information about this school

- Meopham School is sponsored by Swale Academies Trust. When the school joined the trust in 2013 the predecessor school had been judged to be in a category of concern.
- The trust retains responsibility for the governance and management of the school, delegating monitoring responsibility to a local governing body.
- The school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school with a very small sixth form.

- There is a resource base provision for up to 16 pupils who have EHC plans for ASD. Pupils are placed by the local authority, spending time in the specialist base and in the mainstream school.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision or off-site unit.
- The trust provides support for the school as part of the multi-academy trust's ongoing activities. This includes staff development and support when recruitment difficulties make specialist teaching difficult.
- School leaders at all levels have been involved in supporting other trust schools.
- The majority of pupils are White British.
- The number of pupils on roll is increasing over time. The current Year 7 is more than twice the size of the current Year 11.
- The proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is average. A smaller number of pupils than seen elsewhere are looked after by the local authority.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 46 lessons and tutorials (known as ‘advisories’) across the school. They also visited an assembly. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils during lesson visits and looked at their work with them. Pupils’ work was also looked at in formal work scrutiny activities. Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils formally as well as informally around the school and at break- and lunchtimes to gather pupils’ opinions and ideas about the school. They considered the 10 responses to the online pupil questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with a range of school staff, including school leaders; representatives from the trust, including the representative of the chief executive officer; and the local governing body, including the chair of the governing body. Inspectors considered the 41 responses to the online staff survey.
- Inspectors took account of 109 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, including 23 free-text responses and a letter from a parent.
- A wide range of documentation was considered, such as information available on the school’s website, and school records relating to pupils’ attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour. Information on governance, including minutes of local governing body minutes, was examined. The school’s self-evaluation and improvement plans were scrutinised, along with records of the school’s work to keep pupils safe.

Inspection team

Lucy English, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Scott Norman	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Murphy	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Baker	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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