

The North School

Essella Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 8AL

Inspection dates

26–27 September 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have established an ethos of high ambition throughout the school. They have improved the quality of teaching and secured good overall progress for current pupils.
- The Swale Academies Trust provides high-quality support and challenge for leaders and teachers. This has helped the school to improve.
- Governors are highly active and know the school well, making good use of visits. They provide thoughtful support and are increasing their level of challenge to school leaders.
- Staff are committed to the vision of improving the achievement and well-being of every pupil. They work very hard to plan and provide for the different groups of pupils so that they make good progress.
- Leaders have created a broad and balanced curriculum that meets pupils' needs. The wide range of extra-curricular opportunities promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- Leaders have improved pupils' attendance to be in line with national averages. However, attendance for some pupils who attend the student support centre is below average and this hinders their progress.
- In the past, pupils have not made enough progress. However, improvements in teaching over the last two years mean that current pupils make good progress. Pupils in key stage 3 typically join the school with attainment below the national average but are catching up. Older pupils make strong progress but standards remain lower than expected in some areas due to previously weak teaching.
- Students in the sixth form achieve highly in both academic and vocational pathways. Leaders have ensured that the great majority complete their courses. Those who need to improve their English and mathematics are very successful in doing so.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who attend The Laurel Centre, make good progress. Pupils and parents are overwhelmingly positive about this provision and support.
- Pupils are proud of their school, the differences they can see and of their good behaviour. They value the pastoral support and feel safe. However, not all have a deep enough understanding of some aspects of safety.
- A minority of pupils lack the confidence to make decisions for themselves when learning and this holds them back.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teachers are more consistently effective in making sure that pupils develop their confidence and resilience as learners by challenging them more highly.
- Ensure that all adults build on their effective safeguarding training in order to deepen pupils' further understanding of how to keep themselves safe, particularly in the sixth form.
- Improve the attendance of pupils in the student support centre.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders, including those from the Swale Academies Trust, have successfully created a culture of ambition and high expectations. The motivated staff fully subscribe to the ethos of aiming high and they work hard to provide high-quality learning and pastoral care for their pupils.
- The support from the trust has been a significant factor in the school's improvement. For example, effective use of the trust's expertise has improved the quality of teaching and increased pupils' engagement. As a consequence, current pupils' outcomes are now good overall.
- Leaders have created a culture of learning for all. Staff feel supported by leaders and value the high-quality continuing professional development that the trust provides. For example, the professional networks established across the trust have helped to improve the quality of teaching and raise expectations for pupils' achievement.
- The trust has developed carefully planned standardised assessments for pupils across the trust's schools. Leaders use these to check whether teachers' assessments are accurate and to track pupils' progress and attainment across subjects closely. They then use the information to support staff training. This has helped increase teachers' understanding of pupils' achievement, especially in light of the recent changes to public examinations.
- Leadership of The Laurel Centre is highly effective. Pupils attending this provision make rapid progress, with many of them attending mainstream lessons and after-school clubs. In addition, other pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported exceptionally well. Leaders use the additional funding well. Many parents commented positively about the high-quality support, with one parent describing the care as 'exemplary'.
- Leaders use additional funding well to support disadvantaged pupils through a wide range of projects. They have recently sharpened their analysis of the impact of this work. Consequently, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have improved and in some areas are better than those of their peers.
- Additional funding for pupils who need to catch up with their literacy and numeracy is used effectively. The vast majority of pupils involved with this work make accelerated progress with their English and mathematics.
- The broad and balanced curriculum promotes achievement for all. All pupils have the opportunity to continue their study of a modern foreign language. 'Values' lessons and extra-curricular activities provide pupils with a balance to their academic studies. Many pupils take part in the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, ranging from rearing livestock on the school farm to playing in a school band. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning is developed well. However, leaders recognise the need to further develop pupils' understanding of aspects of fundamental British values.
- Leaders have successfully improved attendance across the school, especially the rates of persistent absence. Nevertheless, the small group of pupils who attend the student

support centre still miss school too frequently. Leaders recognise that there is a need to improve the attendance of this group.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for further improvement. Along with the trust and school leaders, they are highly ambitious for the school and its pupils.
- Governors play an active role in the life of the school. They support and challenge leaders by taking part in detailed analysis of the performance of each subject area and using this information to inform planning for school improvement. They make good use of the expertise provided by the trust.
- Along with the trust, governors monitor school progress well, including checking the impact of training to ensure that school improvement is sustained. They have established stringent performance management procedures for staff that are closely linked to pay.
- Governors are taking steps to hold leaders more closely to account for the use of additional funding, including the pupil premium.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. As a result, all staff are committed to looking after pupils and keeping them safe.
- Leaders ensure that all staff receive appropriate training in relation to all aspects of safeguarding, including radicalisation and extremism. This results in a knowledgeable staff who are clear about their responsibilities to keep pupils and students safe. They understand the steps to take if they have any worries.
- Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. They effectively manage a high number of complex cases and work well with families and external agencies to keep pupils safe.
- Governors carry out appropriate checks and visits to ensure that safeguarding is well managed. They look at many aspects of the school's work to keep pupils and students safe. For example, governors spent time in the school looking at the way that accidents are dealt with and recorded. In this way, they ensure that the culture of safeguarding is strong and effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers share leaders' high expectations. They work hard to provide tasks that match pupils' needs and interests. Teachers and teaching assistants engage enthusiastically with the high-quality training provided by leaders and the trust. For example, teachers routinely use the clear lesson structure established by leaders. This has supported teachers to deepen pupils' learning and provide appropriate 'stretch and challenge'.

- Teachers know their subjects well and plan lessons which help pupils to build on their learning over time. Support from subject experts in the trust has been highly effective in improving the quality of teaching, especially in science and English.
- Teaching assistants support pupils well, especially pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They encourage pupils to participate fully in lessons and to give their work a go, even when they are unsure.
- Leaders' work to develop pupils' numeracy across the curriculum has been successful. Teachers routinely emphasise where pupils use their numeracy skills in different subjects, and make sure that these skills are secure. Similarly, most teachers follow the school's literacy policy and work thoughtfully to develop pupils' literacy across the curriculum. Pupils' oracy, in particular, is strengthening as a result of this work.
- Teachers use the trust's approach to assessment to make sure that their assessment of pupils' learning is accurate and that pupils are working at the expected standard. This approach has helped to improve the quality of assessment, especially in English and mathematics, and to make sure that teachers use what they know about pupils' progress to help plan their teaching.
- The vast majority of pupils understand their current progress and the next steps that they need to take to achieve their learning targets. Most teachers follow the school's feedback policy, providing pupils with opportunities to reflect on, and develop, their learning.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and very hard-working. They have developed strong relationships with their pupils. Pupils trust their teachers and are usually willing to attempt more challenging tasks when asked to. However, on some occasions teachers do not expect pupils to think hard enough for themselves or challenge them highly enough to develop the resilience to be self-assured learners.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are respectful of each other. They told inspectors that stereotyping and discriminatory language is not accepted. For example, there has been a whole-school effort to eradicate the use of homophobic language.
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities, along with the assembly programme and 'values' lessons, promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development successfully. They also cover some aspects of fundamental British values.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire would recommend the school to other parents and expressed very positive views about the provision, especially the pastoral support. For example, one parent commented that, 'as parents, we couldn't ask for more'.
- A very small minority of parents raised concerns about bullying. However, pupils told inspectors that there is very little bullying and that staff act swiftly and effectively to stop any that does happen. School information indicates that incidents are dealt with

effectively. Pupils praised the text system that allows them to raise any worry directly with staff, at any time of the day. They told inspectors that it worked very well and helped them to feel safe.

- Some pupils depend on teachers and teaching assistants' confirmation that they are correct in their thinking. This hinders pupils from making faster progress. Leaders are aware of the need to develop pupils' confidence and engagement in their learning by challenging them more highly.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision. The school works closely with these providers to ensure that the personalised programmes support pupils' attendance, personal development and welfare effectively.
- Pupils have good knowledge about keeping safe, including when online. However, a small number of pupils need further support to deepen their understanding about how to keep safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. They use the spaces thoughtfully and are respectful of each other and their school environment. For example, inspectors saw no litter or graffiti around the school.
- Pupils are very positive about the changes to the culture of the school. For example, older pupils told inspectors that lessons were no longer disrupted by poor behaviour as they had been in the past because pupils follow the school rules and focus more on learning.
- School records show that behaviour is much better than it was at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of pupils excluded from school has dramatically reduced because of the work leaders and pastoral support teams have done to support them.
- Staff have created a safe and positive environment in which to learn. Pupils understand the clear boundaries set in lessons and many are confident to share their ideas and questions about their work.
- Leaders have made significant improvements to the way they deal with poor attendance. Staff are tireless in their efforts to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. They work closely with families and outside agencies to tackle persistent absence from school. As a result, rates of persistent absence have reduced and are now in line with national averages.
- A small number of pupils receive support from the school's student support centre. While there has been some use of part-time timetables, recent improvements have ensured that pupils receive their entitlement to full time education. However, the attendance of some of these pupils is too low and this hinders their progress.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision off site are supported well to develop good behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils have improved over time and are now good overall. Current pupils make good progress across most year groups and subjects, including in English and mathematics. This is due to the improvements to teaching and learning and the effective support to help older pupils to catch up from a legacy of underachievement. Pupils are now being prepared well for their next steps.
- Provisional information about the 2017 GCSE results indicates that pupils' achievement in many subject areas improved and moved towards national levels. For example, pupils' progress in mathematics is now in line with national levels. As with other years, pupils taking GCSEs this year made rapid progress over the last two years. However, this was not enough to fully tackle the legacy of past underachievement in areas such as science and humanities. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work confirmed that leaders' actions to raise pupils' achievement in these subject areas and across the curriculum have been successful. Current pupils are now making good progress.
- The literacy and numeracy programmes, funded by the Year 7 catch-up additional funding, are very effective in improving pupils' reading and mathematical skills. The vast majority of pupils involved with this work last year made very good progress in these areas.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are also making good progress. This is due to the wide range of personalised support that they receive as a result of pupil premium funding. Provisional information about the 2017 GCSE results indicates that differences in progress between this group and other pupils nationally diminished, especially in mathematics.
- The most able pupils, especially those in key stage 3, make good progress across the curriculum. This reflects the greater level of challenge introduced throughout lessons.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who are in the resource-based provision, The Laurel Centre, make good progress from their individual starting points. The personalised support that these pupils receive enables them to access mainstream education and continue to their next steps successfully.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision make varied progress from their starting points. Leaders are working closely with providers to make sure that this small number of pupils routinely make good progress.
- The small number of pupils in the school's student support centre do not routinely make good progress. Often, these pupils' poor attendance hinders their learning.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is well led and managed. Leaders are ambitious for this provision and are determined to ensure that it prepares students successfully for their next steps.
- The requirements of the 16 to 19 study programme are met. Students are supported with high-quality pastoral care as well as a range of work experience, work-related learning and enterprise opportunities. Leaders and governors are acutely aware of the

cost of running courses with small numbers. They routinely review available courses and students' progress to make sure that the courses offered meet students' needs.

- The quality of teaching has remained strong in both academic and vocational courses. Teachers plan carefully, matching tasks to students' needs and interests. As a result, students, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress, often better than other students nationally, in both academic and vocational qualifications.
- Students who need to improve their attainment in GCSE English and mathematics make very good progress. In 2016, a much higher proportion than nationally attained a C grade or above when they re-took the examinations.
- Students receive high-quality careers information and guidance when deciding their sixth-form programme of study, and throughout the sixth form. Consequently, the number of students completing courses has improved and the vast majority of students complete their courses as planned.
- The proportion of students moving to level 3 qualifications, including university and gaining scholarships, has increased since the last inspection. Progression to other destinations, including apprenticeships and employment, has also increased. The proportion of pupils engaged in education, employment or training following sixth form is now higher than seen nationally.
- Students are very positive about their experience of the sixth form. They told inspectors that they were very happy with the range and availability of support and that staff always make time to listen. They also appreciate the support provided to access work experience that matches their interests.
- Staff use their high-quality safeguarding training to make sure that students are kept safe. However, leaders recognise that some students' depth of understanding of aspects of how to keep themselves safe, including from radicalisation and extremism, is not yet secure enough.

School details

Unique reference number	118832
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10032894

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
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	1,069
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Liesl York
Head of school	Anna Lawrence
Telephone number	01233 614600
Website	www.north.kent.sch.uk
Email address	north-school@north.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 June 2015

Information about this school

- Since February 2014, at the request of the local authority, the Swale Academies Trust has assumed responsibility for improving the school. The trust has provided leadership and training at all levels. The local authority, the trust and the school are working together so that the school can become an academy and part of the trust.
- The head of school was appointed to post at the start of this academic year, following two years as deputy head of school. She is supported by an executive headteacher from the trust.
- The school is a larger-than-average-sized secondary school and has a sixth form.

- The school has a specialist resource base provision, The Laurel Centre. This is attended by 24 pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. It also has on-site alternative provision for a small number of pupils who are at risk of exclusion.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision at Aspire Academy and Goldwyn Plus.
- The majority of the pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is higher than in other schools nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum standards for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 52 lessons across every subject area and year group. Many of these lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised a wide sample of pupils' books.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, other staff, governors and trust members, and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors also took account of the views of the 51 staff who completed Ofsted's online staff survey.
- An inspector held telephone calls with leaders of alternative provision and the virtual school supporting children who are looked after.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read and spoke with pupils in lessons and around the school. They also met formally with groups of pupils and considered the views from the 60 pupils who responded to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents. They took account of the 112 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and the 67 free-text responses.
- A wide range of documentation was reviewed, including information available on the school's website and records relating to pupils' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour. Information on governance, including minutes of governors' meetings, was examined. The school's self-evaluation summary and the school improvement plan were scrutinised, along with records of the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe.

Inspection team

Lucy English, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Phil Minns	Her Majesty's Inspector
Harry Ingham	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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