

Stratton Upper School

Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 8JB

Inspection dates

24–25 April 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of education has declined since the previous inspection. Leaders' attention has not focused on the improvement of teaching and pupils' progress.
- Leaders' evaluation of performance has not been sharp enough. Consequently, school improvement has been slow.
- Many staff and parents and carers express concerns about the direction the school has taken. They have lost confidence in leaders and the headteacher.
- Trustees and governors' knowledge of staff and parent views is not sufficiently developed. This has prevented a decisive response to current concerns. Some teachers lack confidence in leaders' responses if they report concerns.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils attend school as often as they should, including the disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- Leaders have not used the pupil premium effectively to accelerate the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Until this year, some subject leaders have lacked sufficient support to develop their expertise for leading teaching in their curriculum areas.
- Teachers' expectations are not routinely high enough for all pupils, including the most able.
- In lessons, behaviour is not managed consistently well. Consequently, low-level disruption occurs in some classrooms.
- Some teachers do not use the school's assessment policy to help pupils improve their work, or to promote the best literacy standards.
- Significant staffing changes have occurred and this has also disrupted the quality of teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders' current improvement plans demonstrate an accurate understanding of the school's priorities.
- Newly appointed leaders have introduced improvements to the curriculum, quality of teaching, and pupils' personal development.
- Pupils report that behaviour is improving.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well throughout the school.
- The sixth-form provision is good and older pupils make good progress to their next stage of education, work or training.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - plan work which is sufficiently challenging for pupils of different abilities in order to help them thoroughly develop their knowledge and skills, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have low and higher prior attainment
 - apply the school’s assessment and feedback policy consistently, so that pupils know what they need to do to improve
 - routinely support pupils to improve the accuracy of their spelling and written work.
- Improve pupils’ personal development, behaviour and welfare, by:
 - ensuring that all staff consistently uphold the school’s expectations for conduct in lessons and around the school
 - ensuring that all teachers promote and follow the school’s expectations for work quality and presentation
 - increasing the attendance of groups of pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, so it is at least in line with the national average.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - all members of staff who are responsible for the administration of the school’s single central record are fully trained and confident in every area of their duties, and leaders check on their work to support them
 - leaders, trustees and governors quickly improve the school’s relationship with parents, including communication arrangements, and systems for responding to any parental concerns
 - leaders, trustees and governors review existing arrangements by which staff may report any concerns, to ensure that any member of staff may do so with full confidence
 - all leaders, including those recently appointed, thoroughly monitor the quality of the provision for which they are responsible and act quickly on the findings to increase the pace of improvement
 - senior leaders develop the skills of all subject leaders so that, within their areas of responsibility, they are able to support and hold all teachers to account for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for pupils
 - additional government funds are used effectively to improve disadvantaged pupils’ achievement.

An external review of the school’s use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have not maintained a good quality of education. Teaching standards have fallen and there has been a decline in pupils' progress and the standards that they attain by the end of Year 11.
- This school has experienced a period of instability and uncertainty since its previous inspection, including staff redundancies, changes to its sponsor role for another school, and a building programme. Leaders did not manage this period of instability as well as they could. Their attention was less focused on the improvement of teaching, behaviour and pupils' progress. Inspectors found that significant changes to staffing and leadership positions have slowed down improvement work and affected the stability of teaching. Consequently, many parents and staff are no longer confident that leadership at the school is good.
- Over a third of the parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, disagree that the school is well led and managed. A similar proportion of parents disagree that their children are well taught and make good progress. From the comments on the Ofsted free-text service, many parents disagree that leaders, governors and trustees listen to their concerns, or respond effectively when they report them.
- Over half of the staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire disagree that the school is well led and managed, while almost half expressed concerns with how well leaders consider their well-being and workload when making decisions. In addition, a significant minority of staff do not feel supported when managing behaviour. Importantly, some staff do not feel their concerns receive an effective response when they report them. They also have little trust in the school's arrangements which allow them to confidentially report concerns about their well-being at work.
- Trustees agree that they, governors and the most senior leaders have not followed systematic approaches to gathering and analysing staff and parental views. As a result, they have been unable to fully address the concerns which have arisen.
- Until recently, key aspects of the school's work have lacked sufficient focus on the priorities for improvement, including teaching, pupils' progress and their achievement by the end of key stage 4. Consequently, approaches intended to improve the school did not achieve the desired effects and leaders acknowledge this.
- Some subject leaders are not fully confident in quality assuring the work of their departments. Until this academic year, they have not been supported to fully develop their skills and so they have not been able to hold teachers to account for the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' progress and attainment vary across the school.
- Until this academic year, leaders' arrangements for assessing pupils on entry to the school lacked accuracy, and assessment information was not widely shared across subjects. Consequently, the progress made by Year 9 pupils was slow because teaching had not been suitably matched to their abilities. New leadership has brought about improvement to this area of the school's work. As a result, Year 9 pupils are being

taught more effectively than in the past and are better prepared for key stage 4.

- Following changes to pastoral leadership, routine arrangements for maintaining and improving pupils' attendance have not been effective. Attendance has declined in the current academic year and is below the national average.
- Leaders have not used additional government funding sufficiently well to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils. While the new leader responsible for this area of the school's work has now focused sharply on the barriers faced by these pupils, less attention has been paid to their routine attendance. Consequently, their level of absence has held back their learning and progress.
- In the current academic year, there are positive signs that the school is improving on past weaknesses. Trustees, governors and senior leaders have an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders' plans for improvement reflect the priorities they have identified. A 'task group' of trustees, governors and senior leaders check that actions are making a difference and use their checks to hold leaders to account for their work. However, the rate of improvement is not rapid enough.
- Newly appointed leaders are developing teaching effectively. Their assessment of the quality of teaching is accurate. Their early work has helped teachers and subject leaders to improve their approaches to sharing what best helps pupils to learn and make progress. Leaders and teachers are also more accurate in their judgements about pupils' learning.
- Leaders' systems for tracking pupils' progress are more effective and allow subject leaders to prioritise those pupils who require the most support. As a result, past differences in progress between groups of pupils are being reduced.
- Leaders' arrangements for supporting pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are effective. Pupils are identified and assessed accurately and support plans are carefully designed to help them learn well. However, despite these strengths, variation in the quality of teaching means current pupils' progress is not consistently good.
- Leaders have carefully designed the curriculum to support pupils' academic progress and personal development. Pupils benefit from an effective induction into Year 9 programmes and a wide range of suitable courses in key stage 4 which support their success in the sixth form and prepare them well for work, further training or higher education. Extra-curricular activities support pupils effectively in developing their skills within and beyond the curriculum. Pupils take advantage of activities involving, for example, sport, as well as trips in Britain and abroad, such as to Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Borneo.
- Pupils have extensive opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Through a well-planned curriculum, as well as assemblies, pupils are encouraged to consider relevant issues such as equality and parliamentary democracy. The school has been recognised for its work in Holocaust education and pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- Trustees' and governors' attention was diverted from key areas of the school's work for a long period of time following the previous inspection. This was because of staff

restructuring, redundancies, construction issues and the sponsorship of another school. Consequently, some of their oversight of teaching, pupils' progress and the use of additional funding lacked the focus they currently bring to their work.

- Shared, systematic arrangements for gaining the views of parents and staff have been lacking. This has meant that trustees and the local governing body (LGB) have not worked closely enough with parents and staff, and have not addressed their concerns well enough. At times, relationships have been unproductive. Some staff do not feel confident they can report a concern to governors or trustees.
- Trust leaders and the LGB now hold accurate views of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Current processes for establishing targets, directing improvement and monitoring progress are effective and hold leaders to account. Trustees and the LGB readily recognise the need for greater improvement.
- Members of the trust and LGB currently monitor leaders' use of the pupil premium effectively and hold them to account for the impact made on pupils' progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All staff, trust members and the LGB work to maintain a safeguarding culture where children are protected from risk. All staff, trust members and LGB are suitably trained to carry out their safeguarding roles. Training takes account of all national guidance. Consequently, staff understand how to act on any concerns.
- Staff report any safeguarding concerns they have about pupils quickly and leaders act efficiently to address problems and engage local authorities or other appropriate agencies for help. Safeguarding information is checked carefully and leaders act promptly to help pupils should conditions change.
- Arrangements for checking on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with pupils are effective. However, staff responsible for the administration of the school's single central record need support to be confident in their knowledge that all checks are compliant and complete.
- Leaders have undertaken risk assessments and relevant health and safety certification for the school's working farm.
- While staff readily disclose any concerns about pupil safety and safeguarding, some staff report that they would not currently disclose matters pertaining to their own well-being or professional experience within school to some school leaders, trustees or members of the LGB.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across and within subjects, and across key stage 3 and key stage 4. Teaching is not currently of a high enough quality to ensure that all pupils make the good progress they should.
- Considerable changes to staffing and periods of non-specialist or temporary teaching arrangements have reduced the continuity and quality of teaching in recent years.

- Learning relationships between teachers and pupils vary because of the many changes in staffing. As a result, pupils can lose focus in some lessons, including mathematics.
- In some classes, long-established teachers maintain high expectations for work and learning and pupils are keen to succeed. As a result, these pupils have positive attitudes to learning and make good progress. One good example was seen in a Year 11 construction lesson when students remained determined to try hard when tackling difficult electrical problems.
- Leaders acknowledge that not all teachers use information about pupils' prior learning to plan activities which are well matched to their abilities. As a result, not all teachers demonstrate high enough expectations of pupils, including for the most able and those pupils who did not achieve the standards expected at the end of key stage 2. This lack of challenge affects the quality of work that these pupils produce and it slows their progress.
- Teachers do not promote literacy consistently well across all subjects, particularly for lower-attaining pupils. Consequently, the accuracy of their spelling and written work is of a lower standard than it should be.
- Teachers' use of the school assessment policy is inconsistent. As a result, pupils do not receive the guidance they are supposed to in order to help them improve their work.
- The quality of teaching in mathematics and sciences has been inconsistent across key stage 3 and key stage 4, but it is improving. Leaders and teachers are developing improved approaches to teaching. However, it is too early to evaluate fully the impact of this work on pupils' progress.
- Teachers' use of questioning to support learning and check understanding is inconsistent. However, in English, languages, history and geography teachers use questioning carefully to assess pupils, challenge them to think and then develop a deeper understanding. One good example was seen in a Year 9 English lesson about the Willy Russell play, 'Blood brothers'. As a result of effective questioning, pupils were able to understand and articulate the main themes of the plot.
- The use of teaching assistants to support learning, particularly for pupils with low prior attainment or those who have SEN and/or disabilities, varies widely and reflects the overall quality of teaching. However, inspectors observed some effective support for these pupils, particularly in English lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils' attitudes towards learning vary widely across different subjects and classes and are not consistently good. Despite recent improvements, some pupils lack self-assurance and resilience as learners, and leaders acknowledge this.
- Pupils report that they feel safe at school and have confidence in all staff to deal with instances of bullying, which they believe are now far less frequent at the school.

Leaders have taken action to address bullying in the current year and accurate school records demonstrate that there has been a firm reduction of cases.

- Pupils also report their confidence in disclosing concerns about their welfare to staff at the school and feel assured that they would be helped.
- Pupils are aware of different types of bullying, including physical, racial and homophobic. They also know how to stay safe online and understand the dangers of sharing personal or intimate information with strangers.
- Pupils understand how to lead healthier and more balanced lives. This is a result of improved induction arrangements to help them cope with their studies from Year 9 and the school's guidance on consensual relationships, mental health, resilience and the effects of drugs and alcohol.
- Despite weaknesses in some aspects of the school's work, pupils have a clear understanding of the need to treat others with respect and they support British values.
- A designated leader monitors children looked after to ensure that they receive the support they need. As a result, these pupils are well cared for in school and make progress in their studies.
- Designated staff ensure that pupils who are educated elsewhere are safe and achieve success. Staff communicate with the leaders of alternative provision and effectively monitor the attendance, welfare and progress of pupils who are placed there.
- Pupils serve their school as councillors and senior student officers. They actively raise money for Sport Relief, Cancer Research UK and their own improvement projects within school, including the improvement of equipment and the sixth-form common room.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Teachers do not consistently insist upon the standards expected for positive behaviour and a significant number report that they receive mixed messages from senior leaders when they do.
- When activities do not meet pupils' learning needs, or when expectations are too low, pupils lose interest in their work and low-level disruption can occur.
- Teachers do not have consistently high expectations of the quality of pupils' work. As a result, many pupils' workbooks and folders are untidy and poorly presented.
- Pupils' overall attendance has declined and the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has increased, particularly those who are disadvantaged and who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Despite weaknesses in behaviour, pupils told inspectors that behaviour in lessons has improved in the current academic year, because of the work of their teachers and leaders to communicate higher expectations and because of the importance of their examinations.
- The number of pupils being excluded from school has declined and the number of pupils removed from lessons has also firmly reduced.

- Pupils conduct themselves sensibly between lessons, during break and at lunchtimes in the school dining hall. Pupils report that they feel behaviour is better around school and most show respect and cooperation to one another and adults.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The achievement of different groups of pupils is too variable. This is due to the inconsistent quality of teaching across time.
- Pupils enter the school in Year 9 with broadly average or higher starting points for their age. However, until recently, leaders did not ensure that teachers used this information to set high enough expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. Leaders have taken action to address this and current pupils are making more rapid progress as a result.
- In 2015 and 2016, pupils made average progress in most subjects by the end of Year 11, including in mathematics and English. They made good progress in humanities subjects. However, their progress improved slowly in languages and science.
- In 2017, pupils' progress was below average, having declined sharply across several subjects, particularly in English and mathematics. Their progress in science and languages slowly improved to average, while remaining positive in humanities. The progress of different groups of pupils declined, especially that of boys and those pupils with low and high prior attainment.
- The progress of pupils currently in the school is improving. Following leaders' accurate identification of weaknesses in teaching and analysis of pupils' achievement, progress has improved in the current academic year in key stages 3 and 4. Arrangements for checking on the progress that pupils make are effective. Externally assessed tests, pupils' work and assessment records demonstrate that standards are rising, particularly in the core subjects of English and mathematics.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils was low across 2015, 2016 and 2017 and the differences between their progress and that of other pupils nationally widened over time. Similarly, their attainment fell in key subjects in 2017. This was because the additional support they received did not focus on tackling the specific barriers they face and they did not attend school as often as they should. The school's own performance records and pupils' work indicate that the progress of disadvantaged pupils currently in the school is improving and pupils are achieving more successfully than in previous years.
- In 2017, the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities declined in English and mathematics. This was because teaching was not sufficiently matched to their learning needs. Current pupils are making stronger progress but inconsistencies in the quality of teaching they routinely receive and their lower attendance mean that their progress is not yet consistently good.
- Boys' progress is improving and the difference between their progress and that of girls is narrowing. New leaders have paid closer attention to the way in which many boys are supported to meet the challenges of studying in key stage 4. As a result, more boys are helped to catch up in subjects where they underachieved in the past.
- The progress of pupils with high and low prior attainment is also improving, although

there is variation between year groups.

- Pupils receive effective careers advice and suitable preparation for the next stage of education, training or employment. As a result, a larger proportion of pupils who left Year 11 in 2017 sustained their participation in the sixth form, further education or work with training than did so nationally.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Stable leadership and consistent staffing arrangements have helped maintain effective provision in the sixth form. The leader for this area of the school's work is carefully focused and leads with clarity. Sixth-form leaders' evaluations of performance are accurate and they use their knowledge to support effective approaches to the quality of teaching, programmes of study and students' achievement.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good and students make strong progress in academic and vocational subjects. Between 2015 and 2017, progress improved and by 2017 it was above average in relation to students' different starting points from key stage 4. Differences between the progress of different groups of pupils also reduced during this time, including for the disadvantaged.
- Students achieve particularly well in sciences, mathematics, sociology, geography, languages and film studies. In 2017, there was a slight variation in their progress in history, English, business and economics. However, current accurate assessment records and students' work indicate that progress is strong across most subjects.
- Students who study for vocational courses, including finance, business and health, make similar, strong progress to those who study for A- and AS-level qualifications. Their results demonstrate that they achieve well. This is because their programmes of study are carefully organised to provide them with a challenging curriculum and good teaching. As a result, these students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, work or training.
- Those students who have not achieved the minimum expected GCSE qualifications in mathematics and English make strong progress towards achieving them by the time they leave the sixth form.
- Student numbers entering the sixth form remain high. Leaders and staff provide students with effective, independent advice and guidance, so that they are able to select programmes of study which are well suited to their ambitions. Effective care and support are provided to ensure that they are able to cope with advanced level and other higher courses, following their key stage 4 experiences. Consequently, more students successfully complete their studies than the national average.
- The proportions of students achieving a place in higher education, continued training or work with training are higher than in other schools nationally. More students achieve places in the country's prestigious Russell Group of universities than in other state schools. Equally, more students achieve places in other higher performing universities and other places of study and training. These outcomes reflect well on the school's high-quality careers advice and guidance.
- The sixth form meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes. All students are able to undertake work experience and this provides them with a valuable insight

into the world of work.

- Students take part in well-developed enrichment activities that extend their learning beyond the classroom, including service overseas to support developing countries. Students also serve the school through the student council and by providing mentorship to Year 9 pupils when they join the school. Through these opportunities, the students are able to develop their leadership skills as confident and independent citizens.
- Students feel safe in the school and are confident that in the event of their reporting a concern to staff, they will receive effective support.

School details

Unique reference number	137886
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10046379

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,053
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	320
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Madeline Russell
Headteacher	Robert Watson
Telephone number	01767 220000
Website	www.stratton.beds.sch.uk
Email address	strwatson@stratton.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 April 2013

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It is an academy, run by the Stratton Education Trust.
- The school serves the town of Biggleswade and the surrounding villages. It has a fully functioning farm on the site, which is looked after by the students and specialist staff.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students is below average.
- The proportion of students who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion of students with a statement of special

educational needs or an education, health and care plan is average.

- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, at the end of Year 11.
- The school offers work-related training for a small number of students at the Academy of Central Bedfordshire; PRK Building Services, Biggleswade; and T.C. Harrison Auto Services, St Neots.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection gathered evidence from 55 lessons in all year groups across the school, including some jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons across all year groups and a sample of pupils' books and folders.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation; improvement plans; curriculum information; records about the attainment and progress of pupils, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding; checks on the quality of teaching; performance management arrangements; and the work of governors and trustees. Inspectors also checked the school's single central record.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors held a range of meetings with the school's leaders, including: the headteacher; the designated safeguarding lead; leaders responsible for behaviour and attendance, teaching and learning, Year 9, the curriculum, sixth form, and the use of the pupil premium; various subject leaders; and the coordinator for provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing board and the chair of the trustees.
- Meetings were held with representatives from the school council and more than 70 pupils from key stage 3, key stage 4 and the sixth form. Inspectors also met with a group of pupils who receive additional support. Throughout the two days, inspectors spoke informally with pupils about their experiences, their learning and their safety.
- Inspectors observed pupils during lunchtime and around school.
- Inspectors evaluated 127 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including 87 free-text responses, as well as additional information received from parents and pupils. Inspectors analysed the views of 87 respondents to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff, including 270 comments to different questions, and the 33 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils. Information from a telephone conversation made directly to Ofsted was considered alongside correspondence received over the course of the inspection.

Inspection team

David Turner, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Barr	Ofsted Inspector
Gerard Batty	Ofsted Inspector
Martin Brown	Ofsted Inspector
Vivien Corrie-Wing	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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