

Court Fields School

Mantle Street, Wellington, Somerset TA21 8SW

Inspection dates

30 November–1 December 2016

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies too much both between and within subjects. Although standards are rising overall, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils lags behind that of other pupils.
- Pupils with lower starting points do not make enough progress. Teaching is not yet enabling these pupils to achieve as well as they should. There is minor disruption in some of their lessons. Pupils say that this breaks their concentration and interrupts their learning.
- Some lower ability pupils are not achieving their potential because their writing skills are weak.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have made poor progress in the past. However, leaders have made significant improvements in improving the school's work in this area.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses lacks rigour. This means that they are not always precise enough in identifying where improvements need to occur or what specific action needs to be taken in order to improve provision.
- Leaders' and governors' work to evaluate the impact of the pupil premium lacks precision. As a result, the additional funding is not being used effectively to improve the rates of progress and outcomes of disadvantaged pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The governors, headteacher and staff show great commitment to ensuring that the school serves its community well. They are successfully meeting the welfare needs of their pupils and protecting vulnerable members of the school community.
- The most able pupils make good progress as a result of the effective teaching they receive.
- Senior leaders have taken action to improve behaviour around the school. As a result, the school is calm and orderly. Older pupils talk positively about the improvement they have seen in their time at the school.
- Pupils' personal development is good. They are tolerant and respectful of each other and they are keen to play a part in the life of the school through participation in sporting and community events.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes by ensuring that pupils with lower starting points build a firm foundation in literacy skills so that they can write using correct grammar and spelling.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, so that pupils' achievement is raised by:
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils are given effective help to remove all barriers to their learning
 - raising teachers' expectations of what lower ability pupils can achieve
 - eradicating the remaining instances of minor disruption in lessons.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - senior leaders and governors accurately evaluate the use of pupil premium funding, so that they better understand which initiatives are working and which are less effective
 - all subject leaders make use of their monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching to ensure that teaching improves and any differences in the achievement of groups of pupils are tackled swiftly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have been over-generous in their assessment of the quality of education provided by the school. As a result, weaknesses have not been effectively addressed.
- Leaders do not ensure that disadvantaged pupils make as much progress as they should. Last year's plans to spend the school's pupil premium funding, and the additional funding intended to support pupils who had fallen behind in primary school, were not analysed sufficiently well. Leaders do not know which parts of the plans were effective and which were not. This year's plans are not focused sharply enough on improving teaching to ensure that both of these groups of pupils make the progress that they should.
- Leaders have provided a programme of training for teachers. However, this programme has not resulted in the improvement to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment that leaders had planned for. Some teaching has improved and some has not. School leaders recognise that this is a key priority in their work to secure better achievement and more rapid progress for all pupils.
- Subject leaders have not ensured that school policies are implemented consistently by all teachers. For example, the emphasis given to feedback and correction in line with the school's feedback policy differs significantly from teacher to teacher. Consequently, too many pupils are not clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Senior leaders and governors have implemented an agreed system for performance management of teachers. However, this has only had limited success in improving the quality of teaching.
- Leaders have made improvements to the school since it became an academy in 2014. Standards overall are higher and behaviour has improved significantly. Both pupils and parents recognise these improvements. Governors and leaders know that there is more to do.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. Funding has been used to provide specific interventions for this group of pupils. These interventions enable pupils to develop basic skills more rapidly and lead to greater achievement.
- The leadership of safeguarding is a strength. The school works well with parents and other agencies, such as the local authority's social workers, to protect vulnerable children.
- Senior leaders have created a culture in which pupils are supported well. Heads of house know their pupils as individuals and work well to secure their personal development and well-being needs effectively.

- The curriculum meets the needs of most pupils. It has been redesigned to ensure that all pupils have access to courses that form part of the English Baccalaureate. Pupils have a range of options in Years 10 and 11 that prepares them for further study or training when they leave this school. However, vocational options have recently been withdrawn and this has limited the choice for pupils seeking practical courses.
- Leaders place great emphasis on the participation of pupils in out-of-class activities. Pupils enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and participation rates are high. They involve themselves in sporting and outdoor challenges, such as long-distance moor walking, as well as theatrical and artistic events.

Governance of the school

- The trust has recently reorganised its governance and the school now has its own local governing body. This new group of governors knows the school well and is committed to securing improvements. Local governing body meeting minutes demonstrate that governors are challenging senior leaders and asking probing questions about the performance of groups of pupils. The governing body has recently commissioned, and received, a comprehensive review of how the school is using its pupil premium funding. As a result of this review, school leaders are developing an improved strategy for how the pupil premium is spent. It is too early, however, to see the impact of this development.
- The trust has ensured that its two schools work together to improve teaching and share training opportunities where appropriate. However, the impact of collaboration between the two schools has so far been limited. The other school in the trust has recently become a teaching school. Plans are in place to take advantage of the opportunities for improving teaching that this will bring.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Governors and senior leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to keep pupils safe. Governors frequently check on the quality of the school's safeguarding work. These checks are welcomed by senior leaders and recommendations are acted upon. Staff are well trained and take their duties seriously.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. They highlighted the usefulness of regular briefings in assemblies and lessons. This safeguarding focus, across the curriculum, helps pupils to be aware of the dangers that they may encounter.
- School leaders have developed strong partnerships with other agencies, for example social workers, in order to protect the most vulnerable pupils. As a result, these pupils continue to make progress in spite of the difficulties they face.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers' expectations of pupils across different subjects are too variable. In some subjects, for example in humanities, teachers set challenging work and expect good standards of presentation and, as a result, pupils clearly set out their ideas and understanding of the world around them. In other subjects, expectations are uneven and so pupils' progress is not as strong.
- Overall, the teaching of pupils with lower starting points is characterised by work which is too easy and so lacks interest and engagement from pupils. As a result, these pupils make slow progress. Pupils' books show that they can achieve much more and reach higher standards when expectations from teachers are high.
- The amount of support pupils receive in lessons from teachers is too variable. Pupils know that sometimes they are provided with all the help they need to make good progress, but teaching is inconsistent and that help is not forthcoming in all cases. Pupils then struggle to learn new ideas.
- Leaders have ensured that most of the feedback received by pupils is in line with the school's policy. Pupils like the system, with many now using feedback to improve their work. However, this is not the case for some lower ability pupils and, as a result, their progress is slower.
- Poor standards of literacy are an additional barrier for many pupils with lower starting points. Teachers do not consistently apply the school's policy about correcting pupils' spelling and grammatical errors. As a result, pupils tend to repeat the same mistakes.
- There is some effective teaching across a range of subjects. However, the quality is inconsistent both between and within subjects. As a result, the progress of pupils now in the school is also variable. Some inspiring teaching leads to an enthusiastic response from pupils and so they make good progress. There is some strong teaching in English, mathematics, drama, physical education (PE) and design and technology, for example. Pupils enjoy being challenged, and in these lessons, pupils are keen to tackle the work that requires them to think deeply.
- The most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make better progress as a result of teachers having higher expectations and setting them thought-provoking work. Teachers create a positive atmosphere for learning, with the result that these pupils are keen to answer questions and do well.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The quality of pastoral support and care is strong. Pupils report that they feel known and cared for as individuals. Staff have a good knowledge of individual pupils and so support them effectively when needed.

- Pastoral staff work hard to ensure that a range of effective support is in place to protect the most vulnerable pupils. This includes access to a counsellor. Pupils say how much they value the school's commitment to them.
- Pupils report that bullying is uncommon and is dealt with well when it does occur. They are confident in approaching adults for help with any concerns they might have.
- The school promotes a culture of tolerance and respect for each other across and this is evident in how pupils treat each other. For example, pupils are confident that a pupil's sexual orientation is no barrier to them being welcomed into the school community.
- Pupils wear their uniform and the awards badges they achieve with pride. There are a number of opportunities for pupils to take on roles of responsibility, such as prefect, and they are keen to get involved.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- There is minor disruption in some lessons, especially in lower ability classes. Although behaviour has improved, when disruption occurs, learning falters.
- Attendance for most pupils is in line with the national average. However, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is poor. Despite great efforts, the school has not been able to improve the attendance of these pupils over the last two years.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusions is too high but it is reducing steadily as a result of leaders' success in tackling poor behaviour. Pupils report that behaviour has improved both because leaders and teachers have revised the behaviour code and because pupils' attitudes to school and each other have also improved.
- The behaviour of pupils around the school site at lunchtime and between lessons is generally good. Pupils walk and talk together pleasantly. Where there is some boisterousness, it is usually good-natured.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is uneven. Some pupils are doing well as a result of the high expectations of their teachers. Others do not flourish because too little is expected of them.
- Current pupils' progress is not consistently strong across the age range for different groups of pupils. In 2016, the rate of progress of disadvantaged pupils was significantly below that of other pupils. It remains uneven for those in the school now.
- A preponderance of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are in lower or middle sets. Consequently, they experience more disruption to their learning and, at times, are set lower expectations than other pupils.

- Older pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made poor progress in the past because they did not receive the support that they needed. Changes in leadership and to the curriculum mean that younger pupils are now receiving the help and academic support they need to achieve. A curriculum that better supports and develops their basic skills is enabling pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to access mainstream lessons with increased confidence. As a result, these pupils are now progressing in line with other pupils in the school.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, generally achieve well across most subjects. Their work demonstrates that they are able to consider questions carefully and explain well, demonstrating their reasoning and understanding.
- Standards of attainment overall are improving. In 2016, pupils achieved above the national average in gaining A*–C grades in both English and mathematics. However, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have failed to keep pace.
- Pupils benefit from an effective programme of careers guidance which begins in Year 7. This programme continues through to Year 11. Consequently, pupils are well informed when they make their GCSE choices in Year 9. They also have a range of opportunities to learn more about their career options as they prepare to leave this school. Disadvantaged pupils receive the additional support they need to make decisions about their choices once they leave this school.
- High expectations and good-quality teaching ensure that pupils make rapid progress in humanities. In 2016, Year 11 pupils made significantly faster progress in humanities than found nationally. There is also evidence of strong achievement in design and technology, and drama. Here too, pupils respond to highly effective teaching by subject specialists. In turn, they show a strong commitment to, and a pride in, their work.

School details

Unique reference number	140416
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10019945

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	730
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Sheila Naylor
Headteacher	Rachael Bennett
Telephone number	01823 664201
Website	www.courtfields.net
Email address	rbennett1@educ.somerset.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- Court Fields School became a sponsored academy on 1 January 2014. It is sponsored by the Castle Partnership Trust. At the time of the conversion, the school shared its governing body with another school in the trust. In September 2016, a local governing body was formed which took over the day-to-day governance of Court Fields School.
- The school shares a trust with The Castle School, Taunton, a teaching school, and receives support from it.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than average. However, the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is below average.
- Over 90% of pupils are from White British backgrounds and few speak English as a second language.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the school's senior leaders, a wide range of staff, the executive headteacher of the trust and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors met formally with three groups of pupils, covering all age groups and including disadvantaged and most-able pupils. In addition, inspectors talked to a number of other pupils informally around the site at break- and lunchtimes, as well as before and after school.
- Inspectors visited classrooms, often with senior leaders, in all year groups and across a wide range of subjects. They observed tutor time and an assembly. In lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work and discussed it with them. They listened to a number of pupils read both in lessons and on their own. Inspectors also looked at a wide sample of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with the school's designated safeguarding lead and looked at a wide range of documents and records concerning safeguarding. Inspectors also checked that arrangements, such as the maintenance of the single central record, met all statutory requirements.
- Inspectors evaluated information and other documentary evidence, including that relating to assessment and the school's self-evaluation. Inspectors took account of the 89 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, as well as the school's own parent survey.

Inspection team

Andrew Lovett, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Stephen Lee	Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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