

Simon Balle All-Through School

Mangrove Road, Hertford, Hertfordshire SG13 8AJ

Inspection dates

9–10 May 2018

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
Early years provision	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders, managers and governors have been relentless in their quest to make this an outstanding school. They have managed change exceptionally well, and their efforts have now reaped rewards for pupils.
- Leaders at all levels play a significant role in school improvement. They all fully support the school's vision and values. Systems to hold staff to account for their performance are rigorous.
- High-quality teaching motivates pupils to achieve and makes them outstanding learners. Teachers use assessment well to plan for learning which challenges all pupils.
- Pupils' progress is rapid and sustained. All groups of pupils achieve very well across a wide range of subjects.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very strong.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They are very well cared for by staff. Pupils are taught to appreciate people's differences. Equal opportunities underpin the school's moral purpose.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides pupils with excellent opportunities to develop their skills and nurture their talent.
- The school promotes pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development extremely well. Pupils are well equipped to be model British citizens.
- The early years provision serves as an excellent springboard to children's educational journey at Simon Balle. Children make strong and sustained progress, and their needs are very well met.
- Parents and carers, staff and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the school and its aims. Communication with parents is highly effective.
- The sixth-form provision is good. However, students' progress has not been as impressive as that of younger pupils in the school. Leaders have now carefully considered the suitability of the courses on offer with the aim of providing a fully inclusive sixth form.
- The quality of the sixth-form improvement planning does not match the high levels of rigour found in the rest of the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make the sixth-form provision outstanding by:
 - sharpening the effectiveness of improvement planning processes in order to achieve excellence
 - ensuring greater consistency in students' outcomes, particularly for those who achieve a grade B or C at the end of key stage 4
 - continuing to monitor the impact of the recently introduced vocational courses on students' progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The highly skilled and committed senior leadership team has worked relentlessly and collaboratively over time in order to make Simon Balle an outstanding school. Leaders have successfully managed the introduction of the primary and early years provision, while still maintaining the high standards that existed prior to this expansion.
- The headteacher's clear vision for the school is known and shared by everyone. Strong moral values underpin the school's aims and ethos. Leaders treat all pupils as individuals, and do not regard pupils' background or prior attainment as a barrier to how well they can achieve. Pupils come first in this school, and equal opportunities are at the forefront of what the school stands for.
- Staff hold the school's senior leaders in very high regard. They speak positively about the support they receive and the way they are strongly held to account for their performance. Staff feel valued for the contribution they make towards the school's effectiveness.
- The school's evaluation of its own effectiveness is well considered and accurate, based on ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review procedures. Inspectors concurred with all of the judgements made.
- Parents, staff and pupils who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaires are overwhelmingly supportive of the school's work. One parent who responded to Parent View stated: 'This school has been the best school I could have hoped for for my son. He has made fantastic progress and enjoys going to school. I can honestly say I would not want my children to attend any other school!'
- The senior leadership team is ably supported by a strong team of middle leaders, with subject and pastoral responsibilities, who have played a crucial role in making the school outstanding.
- Systems to hold leaders at all level to account are well established. Successes are rightly celebrated, and members of staff are supported in coming forward with innovative ideas and suggestions, which contribute towards the school's improvement.
- Leaders and teachers of all key stages regard this as one all-through school and are constantly looking to see how to ensure a smooth transition for pupils. For example, one leader has looked closely at how modern foreign languages can be taught from Reception Year onwards, building on the progress made from key stage 1 to key stage 2 and beyond.
- Many members of staff are supported in their professional development, including gaining leadership qualifications. Others have been encouraged to become subject examiners in order to develop their understanding of how pupils are assessed.
- Teaching is managed extremely well. Teaching is routinely monitored for its impact on pupils' progress. Good practice is regularly shared. Observations of teaching inform the school's leaders about what works well, and this then determines the content of staff training.

- The school makes effective use of the additional funds with which it is provided. The Year 7 catch-up premium is particularly well targeted to support pupils in developing their literacy and numeracy skills. The additional funds for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities enable these pupils to do well. The pupil premium is used smartly to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sport premium has been used effectively to date. This has included funding the purchase of more equipment for pupils in key stage 1, staff training, specialised coaching sessions and the introduction of physical literacy linked to all subjects across the curriculum.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is reviewed annually for its impact on pupils' outcomes. The curriculum is enriched through an exceptionally wide range of clubs and activities, particularly relating to sport and music. Uptake is high and no groups are disadvantaged by not being able to take part.
- The school communicates with parents very effectively. Pupils' progress is regularly reported on, and parents are complimentary about the approachability of staff in the school.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well indeed. The school's values are drawn on at every available opportunity across the curriculum to develop this important aspect of its work. Pupils who met with inspectors demonstrated a strong awareness of fundamental British values and the contribution they are able to make towards a harmonious modern British society in which every individual is valued.

Governance of the school

- Members of the governing body are highly experienced and bring with them a wide range of skills and attributes, which enable them to hold the school's leaders to account. Skills include those pertaining to finance, human resources, education and social media.
- Governors meet regularly either as a full governing body or in their sub-committees. The structure of governance has been strategically thought through. Members typically belong to at least two sub-committees. This aids communication between governors and is an effective way of ensuring that important issues are not overlooked.
- Governors handle the management of the all-through school adeptly to ensure that the high standards already achieved in the secondary provision are maintained in the early years and key stage 1.
- Governors' reports and notes of visits are detailed with points for action. Minutes of governing body meetings indicate the way governors hold the school's leaders rigorously to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff have a strong understanding of all matters relating to the safeguarding of children. They have received and read the statutory documentation to keep up to date

with the latest guidance. There is an established culture of vigilance to ensure that any issues in relation to safeguarding are identified quickly.

- The procedures for recording child protection matters are thorough. Child protection records are very well maintained and kept secure. Files are ordered chronologically with details of any resolution.
- The single central record of recruitment checks of staff is compliant with current requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Pupils typically experience teaching which is of a consistently high quality. Teachers have strong and secure subject knowledge. They convey their enthusiasm for their subjects very well to pupils and keep up to date with latest developments.
- Teachers make excellent use of a range of resources. A common feature of lessons is the use of digital tablets, which all pupils possess. Through these, and a wide range of other resources, pupils are actively encouraged to be inquisitive learners and to develop their research skills.
- Assessments of pupils' progress are regular and take many forms, all of which serve to effectively inform teachers' planning. Inspectors observed accurate assessment of pupils' progress through well-targeted questioning, peer and self-assessment and easily accessible online tests.
- Teachers implement the school's assessment policy consistently. Across all key stages, pupils respond positively to teachers' comments, both written and verbal, and show a keen desire to improve through their constructive use of allocated 'polishing time'.
- Little time is wasted in lessons because learning is meticulously planned by teachers. Teachers use assessments wisely to plan well for pupils' learning and progress. Work is well matched to pupils' different needs.
- Pupils respond positively to their teachers' high expectations. Pupils are expected to try hard and achieve highly, whatever their starting points. Pupils relish the opportunity to challenge themselves through the variety of tasks provided by their teachers.
- Additional adults in the classroom are highly effective in enabling those pupils who require additional support to understand the work and make effective progress. Communication between teaching assistants and class teachers is excellent.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy is promoted very well across a wide range of subjects. Teachers are astute at identifying opportunities to develop these key skills, and they encourage pupils to apply them at every available opportunity.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.

- Despite the large size of the school, pupils are known and treated as individuals. The heads of year and heads of subjects liaise very well with one another to promote the development of the whole child. Pastoral staff said that they feel valued by the senior leaders; they work very effectively to support the academic development of pupils in their year groups.
- Pupils said they feel safe in the school. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare. Pupils are well educated in understanding what bullying might look like. They are very confident that any reported incidents of bullying would be dealt with swiftly and effectively. Restorative justice is used to very good effect to resolve differences between pupils.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of e-safety and the risks associated with the use of social media. The school has identified a number of pupils to be 'EduTech Ambassadors' who promote safe use of the internet.
- Pupils are valued for who they are, and prejudice of any sort is not tolerated in the school. The school's racist incident log is analysed forensically by year group and across the school. Racist incidents are extremely rare.
- Pupils value the efforts staff make in the school to promote their well-being. One pupil told inspectors: 'Teachers will move mountains to make sure you're happy.'
- Vulnerable pupils are nurtured well and feel that they can approach any member of staff should they experience difficulties. They told inspectors: 'We are one big family.'
- Same-sex relationships and varied family structures are openly discussed and celebrated in the school. Pupils have a detailed understanding of people who have protected characteristics under the Equalities Act (2010).
- The school closely monitors the performance and well-being of any pupils who attend alternative provision. Attendance at such provision is typically regular and pupils are well supported and achieve well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are exceptionally well mannered. They routinely greet one another and guests to the school in a warm and friendly manner. They hold open doors for their teachers and one another.
- Pupils move around the school with purpose. Hence, they arrive at their lessons punctually and ready to learn.
- Behaviour in lessons is excellent. Pupils respect their teachers and have positive attitudes towards their learning.
- The school's values and the 'learning for life' programme complement each other to ensure that positive behaviour is the norm for pupils.
- Pupils wear their uniform smartly. This is indicative of the great pride they have in their school. Displays in classrooms and in the corridors are kept in pristine condition, which reflects the respect pupils have for the school environment.
- Pupils clearly enjoy coming to school. Their attendance in both the primary and the secondary phase is above the national average. This high attendance also relates to

different groups of pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. Persistent absence is below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have fixed-period exclusions is very low. This is due to the strong pastoral care and guidance, which identify potential issues early on, before they escalate.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils' progress has been very strong and sustained by the end of key stage 4 for the last two years. This is undoubtedly linked to the highly effective teaching and pupils' notably positive attitudes towards their learning.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including those who are most able, achieved particularly well in 2017, making the school one of the highest performing in the local authority.
- The most-able pupils make rapid and sustained progress. This is because their teachers plan for their needs exceptionally well, and pupils rise to the challenges their teachers set them. Inspectors observed many detailed and mature discussions led by pupils.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make effective progress from their different starting points. Teachers are particularly aware of their specific needs and adapt the teaching so that these pupils can access and understand what they are learning.
- Across all groups of pupils in key stage 3, there are no noticeable differences in the outstanding progress that they make. This sustained progress across a wide range of subjects is demonstrated through inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work. Work provided is suitably challenging whether pupils are grouped by ability or whether they are taught in mixed-ability groups.
- The rate of progress in Years 1 and 2 matches that higher up the school. Reading, writing and numeracy are taught very well, and ongoing assessments enable teachers to provide a strong degree of challenge to encourage great resilience among these young learners.
- The proportion of pupils in Year 1 who met the required standard in the phonics screening check was well above the national average at 93% in 2017.
- Pupils enjoy reading immensely. They make excellent use of the school library, which regularly hosts local authors. Pupils who read to inspectors did so with great fluency and expression, and older pupils were able to talk about different literary genres.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Strong leadership of the early years provision ensures that expectations are high. This has led to children securing rapid progress. Pupils join the provision with skills which are broadly typical for their age; they complete the early years with a good level of development, which has been above the national average for the last two years. In 2017, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development was 12% above the national average.
- High levels of consistency in the quality of leadership and management and very strong teaching mean that children are well prepared to start Year 1. This is particularly the

case in terms of their independence, initiative, cooperation, curiosity and ability to read, write and use number. Teaching challenges children to explain new things and develops their language well.

- Disadvantaged children receive well-targeted support, and their progress is in line with, and often better than, that of other children, even when attainment is low. Children who have SEN and/or disabilities are equally well supported because teachers are quick to support them. For example, those who have problems with speech, language and communication are identified and supported very well.
- Teachers convey their high expectations of behaviour to ensure a calm and purposeful environment both inside and in the outdoor area. The outdoor area is particularly well resourced, and inspectors observed children working cooperatively with others and genuinely willing to help their classmates.
- Assessment of children's progress is frequent and accurately carried out by teachers and teaching assistants.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Children also look forward to their weekly Spanish lesson. Inspectors observed children confidently singing Spanish songs and learning the Spanish words for insects, which linked closely to their topic of mini-beasts.
- Strong links with the pre-schools, private nurseries and the new on-site Nursery ensure a smooth transition. Visits are two-way and the early years leader has enabled a particularly smooth transition from the new Nursery using the same phonics programme and encouraging cursive writing.
- Parents are actively encouraged to be involved in their child's education, both through an online assessment system and the use of blogs. Activities over the Easter holiday involved parents helping their children to write diaries and the provision of reading lists so that they could read with their children at home.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding procedures and apply them well. Children are safe and happy in the setting and attend regularly.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- After a period of transition, the new leaders of the sixth form are committed to improving its curriculum offer, acknowledging that if the sixth form is to meet the needs of all students, a more inclusive choice of subjects and qualifications is necessary. Hence, the school has increased the vocational offer, while maintaining the more traditional advanced-level courses. Leaders aim to make Simon Balle the preferred choice for students when they consider their options for 16 to 19 study programmes.
- Teachers in the sixth form have strong subject knowledge and convey their enthusiasm for their subjects well. This motivates students and encourages good group dynamics, particularly when students are presenting their findings or debating a topical issue.
- A good proportion of students who re-sit qualifications in English and/or mathematics are successful in Year 12. Students enjoy greater success in re-sitting English than mathematics.

- Attitudes to learning are positive, and students attend regularly. Retention rates in the sixth form are high. Safeguarding is effective in the sixth form.
- Academic results have been strong for the most able students and these students achieve well. Outcomes over time show some inconsistency across subjects, particularly for students who have middle prior attainment at the end of key stage 4. However, leaders are aware of underperforming subjects and have taken appropriate action to improve the quality of teaching or to remove them altogether. Inspectors' review of students' current overall progress indicates improvement.
- Students are happy in the sixth form and many see this provision as a natural next step when considering their options at the end of Year 11. Students are offered many opportunities to develop their leadership skills. They are involved in a range of extra-curricular activities and mentor younger pupils. Many go on to study a wide range of subjects at university.
- Students spoke positively to inspectors about their experience in the sixth form. They described it as 'inclusive' and 'a community where everyone counts', and said that 'staff are accessible' and 'they care'.
- Careers advice and guidance are a strong feature of the provision. Students said that staff make every effort to ensure that they pursue the right career pathway and they are confident that they are studying subjects which will enable them to achieve their goals. Work experience is closely linked to students' programmes of study. Students are made aware of other pathways beyond university, including apprenticeships.
- The sixth-form improvement plan rightly identifies key priorities to improve the provision. However, the plan is insufficiently focused to enable leaders to accurately evaluate the impact of their actions.
- As the vocational curriculum offer has been expanded, leaders acknowledge the importance of continuing to monitor the delivery of these courses and the progress made by students who have opted to study them. This is because progress made by students following vocational courses has been variable over time.

School details

Unique reference number	140294
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10046579

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1337
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	303
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Connolly
Headteacher	Alison Saunders
Telephone number	01992 410400
Website	www.simonballe.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@simonballe.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Simon Balle All-Through School converted to an academy in November 2013. It became an all-through school in September 2015. The school currently has children in the early years, pupils in Years 1, 2 and 7 to 11, as well as students in the sixth form.
- The school is larger than the average-sized school.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language are well below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below the national average as is the proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school makes use of the services of the Rivers Educational Support Centre in Hoddesdon.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was conducted with one day's notice.
- Inspectors observed pupils' learning across most year groups and across a wide range of subjects. At the time of the inspection, Year 10 pupils had internal examinations. Inspectors looked at pupils' books across a wide range of subjects and all year groups. Work scrutinised represented different groups of pupils in the school, including disadvantaged pupils, most-able disadvantaged pupils, higher-attaining pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and heads of year, different groups of pupils, and the chair and six additional members of the governing body. A telephone conversation took place with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised: school improvement documents; policies; information on pupils' progress; records of the quality of teaching; information on pupils' behaviour and attendance; and the single central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- Inspectors considered 353 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View and 129 responses to the staff questionnaire. Ofsted also took account of numerous letters and emails received from parents. There were 32 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

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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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