

# Bexhill Academy

Gunters Lane, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex TN39 4BY

## Inspection dates

3–4 May 2017

|  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                 | <b>Good</b>          |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management   | <b>Good</b>          |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | <b>Good</b>          |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare  | <b>Good</b>          |
| Outcomes for pupils                          | <b>Good</b>          |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- In the last three years the school has improved beyond all recognition. Major changes, particularly to the pods (classrooms) and the curriculum, have been skilfully directed by the dedicated trust governors and the principal.
- In 2016, pupils' progress in English and mathematics almost matched that seen nationally. This year, pupils are making strong progress in these subjects.
- The great majority of pupils behave sensibly and are keen to learn and do well. Older pupils appreciate how much things have improved.
- Provision for vulnerable pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is very successful. It is matched by the high quality of care for pupils' safety and well-being.
- Disadvantaged pupils underachieved in 2016. The actions taken this year are making a difference and teachers are increasingly successful at helping these pupils to learn well.
- The most able pupils do not always do work matching their ability and girls tend to make slightly better progress than boys. Leaders are tackling these issues.
- The principal has tackled the weaknesses in the past with determination and skill. She is extremely well supported by a hard-working and wise senior leadership team.
- Staff morale is high, with almost 100% of staff being proud to work at the school. Referring to the building changes, a teacher wrote, 'I have been here since "pod land" and the improvement is phenomenal'.
- The quality of teaching has moved into a higher gear. Lead practitioners bolster its effectiveness in several subjects, helping staff to generate rapid progress.
- Several middle leaders, appointed since the previous inspection, have reinforced this layer of leadership. Those who are less experienced appreciate others sharing their expertise.
- Attendance has gone up but there are still too many pupils who need intensive support and encouragement to attend regularly. Parents are increasingly accepting the help offered.
- Occasionally, the pace of lessons drops and learning slows down. A few teachers do not follow the school's homework policy consistently, so younger pupils do not receive enough feedback to help them to improve their work.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase pupils' progress and improve outcomes, by:
  - persevering with the most successful strategies to tackle poor attendance, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and others with high levels of absence
  - intensifying the well-considered actions taken to support disadvantaged pupils' learning
  - monitoring whether the most able pupils tackle work at the right level for them and whether boys and girls are achieving equally well.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching and middle leadership, by:
  - sharing the expertise that exists between and within subjects
  - making sure that the pace of lessons does not slow down
  - checking that the school's homework policy is followed consistently so that all pupils, especially those in Years 7 to 9, receive helpful feedback on their work.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The previous inspection report described the new principal as 'driving improvements with confidence and determination'. A monitoring visit six months later referred to a 'palpable sense of optimistic urgency permeating the school'. Both these observations were absolutely right; this year, the principal can celebrate the school's transformation because pupils are taught well and achieving well.
- The principal had to overcome considerable hurdles to tackle the school's weaknesses. These included dividing pods for 90 pupils into smaller classrooms (generating major building works), completely restructuring the curriculum and reorganising the leadership structure. This was all at the same time as improving the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- In their written comments, staff referred to 'giant strides forward' and parents were equally complimentary, saying, 'I recommend this school whenever the opportunity arises.' It is not surprising that first-choice applications for Year 7 have increased by 50%.
- The leadership and management structure is now streamlined and efficient, with members of the senior leadership team contributing a great deal to the school's improvements. The quality of middle leadership is more secure but there is variation in the effectiveness of these leaders in raising standards for all pupils. Senior leaders support middle leaders well as they strive for stability and consistency in practice.
- High-quality professional development for all staff is comprehensive, regular and effective. For example, the special educational needs coordinator and head of unit for pupils on the autistic spectrum (ASPie) describe the best way for teachers to help these pupils to learn. They give teachers strategies to support pupils such as children looked after or pupils returning to mainstream lessons from the Bridge (supporting pupils at risk of exclusion).
- Staff much appreciate being able to select training sessions that they feel are most relevant to improving their teaching. They value lead practitioners sharing their expertise within and between departments. A member of staff described how these experienced teachers 'have really helped me to develop my teaching'. Several science teachers are being supported to take AS levels in their non-specialist subject.
- Clear line-management structures mean that senior and middle leaders regularly report on pupils' progress and know they are accountable for their departments' outcomes. Their performance management includes measures for disadvantaged and most-able pupils, matching the realistic school development plan. Supported by the governing body, leaders carefully prioritise the improvements needed.
- Disentangling the way subjects were merged in the past took some time and required more subject expertise among staff. The good, revised curriculum is now well established and reviewed annually to respond to pupils' interests. Year 9 pupils like choosing one GCSE option subject to study and complete in Year 10. The weighting for English and mathematics lessons is wise as these subjects underpin so many others.
- The school's personal, social, health education (PSHE) programme, assemblies and

tutor times contribute a great deal to pupils' good understanding of British values and of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Pupils enjoy creative subjects such as art, photography and dance, do extremely well in a large number of sports and appreciate the good range of after-school activities.

- The school spends the additional funds it receives carefully. Leaders carried out detailed analysis of the allocation of funds for disadvantaged pupils in 2016. This revealed that money spent to improve attendance was particularly effective at raising standards because the correlation between poor attendance and poor outcomes is strong. Other funds for pupils who need to catch up, children looked after and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities contribute well to these pupils' learning.
- The school's planning and guidance for pupils to consider their careers and post-16 choices starts in Year 7 and are extremely effective. The approach is underpinned by raising pupils' aspirations and informing them about the different routes they can follow to achieve their ambitions.
- The school's mission statement: 'To be remarkable by working together as a community, within an ethos of care, respect and responsibility' is reflected in all the governors', leaders' and staff's work.

### **Governance of the school**

- The chair of governors is dedicated to the school that his trust took on under three years ago. He describes it as a 'super tanker' that required time and hard work to move. The chair oversees the trust's financial support for the school and is also expert at seeking external funds. Other governors also bring highly relevant expertise and knowledge to their work; one of them, an engineer, contributed to the remodelling of the pods.
- Governors are delighted to see the major changes they have supported finally bearing fruit in improved outcomes. Nevertheless, they will not stop probing the principal about the information on progress that she presents to them. Several governors have worked in education for many years; they and the principal regularly bring in specialists to review and support the school's work. Governors have a realistic insight into the quality of teaching and know that high staff morale underpins success. This they have achieved, as exemplified by one of many comments written by staff, 'This school is now simply the best and I am proud to be part of it.'

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has a number of vulnerable pupils and above-average percentages of children looked after and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders make absolutely sure that all staff, whatever their role, are fully trained in issues relating to children's safety and well-being. Regular sessions keep staff updated on any significant developments, whether about child sexual exploitation, extremism, or the importance of reporting any concerns as soon as possible.
- The local authority carried out a review of all aspects of safeguarding and was

complimentary about all of the school's practice being 'beyond statutory requirements'. Members of staff liaise with local social services and other relevant organisations whenever they feel issues need external input. Staff keep meticulous records of the support and effectiveness of help which pupils receive.

- Leaders and support staff work hard to involve parents and carers in their child's education. An increasing number of parents attend meetings and events and respond to invitations to discuss their child's work or personal issues with staff. The school's website guides parents to numerous relevant sites and recommends courses, such as 'Living with Teens', which they may find helpful.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Stimulating and interesting displays in all classrooms and other teaching areas help pupils to enjoy their lessons. During the inspection, inspectors identified several features of teaching that contributed to rapid progress. These included:
  - keeping up a good pace during lessons so pupils have to concentrate (and quickly identifying those who need help to do so)
  - giving pupils clear guidance about what they need to do to improve their work
  - planning work which matches groups of pupils' different starting points
  - in-depth subject knowledge and how to explain its content clearly
  - using pictures, film clips and other resources to stimulate pupils' interest
  - posing layers of increasingly challenging questions which encourage pupils to think hard and articulate their answers clearly
  - exploring pupils' responses, particularly to GCSE questions, to help them to appreciate how they can improve the detail and clarity of their explanations.
- The quality of teaching and learning has certainly improved since the previous inspection. It is not yet outstanding because there are pockets of inconsistency which are reflected, for example, in the slower progress made by the most able pupils and weak outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Teachers know that pupils' reading and writing must have a high priority in all subjects. With new GCSE-style questions demanding longer written explanations, writing at length starts in Year 7. Geography and history teachers are particularly diligent about extending pupils' literacy skills. Working in the library (which did not exist in the past), enthusiastic library and support staff successfully select programmes that best suit pupils' needs; many pupils make rapid progress in reading and comprehension.
- Pupils tackle weekly English and mathematics challenges in tutor times (also accessible by parents on the school's website). The tasks set are well-considered but their impact depends on how well tutors use them. Some do this very well, so that all pupils reflect, for example, on using semi-colons or how much a discount is worth; a few tutors do not get all pupils to concentrate.
- Teachers regularly provide extra materials and in-class support for disadvantaged pupils or those who find a subject difficult. As well, most of them now prepare challenging work (called 'Apex') for the most able pupils if they are ready to move on. In history, for example, they might be asked to consider the limitations of a source in addition to what they can infer from it.

- Experienced and well-qualified teachers work in the ASPIe unit and the Bridge and know and support these pupils' specific needs well. Teaching assistants play an important role for these pupils, linking what they do in their base areas with work in lessons.
- The school has carefully considered how to measure and record pupils' progress. Leaders have already generated an assessment system based on the new GCSE 1 to 9 grades which are translated down to Year 7. The outcomes of regular tests are brought together, not to predict GCSE outcomes but to intervene if pupils are not making enough progress from their starting points.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pastoral leaders work tirelessly to support and consult pupils and their families about their individual social needs, difficult home situations or, for example, to provide continuity for children looked after.
- Examining case studies of pupils with extremely poor attendance in 2016, inspectors found that the breadth and depth of support to help these pupils and their families to overcome their circumstances was quite clear.
- The school's care for pupils starts before they enter Year 7. Attendance officers and pastoral leaders visit every primary school. They learn about pupils' learning needs and families' situations so they are ready to provide the right support. They seek contributions from local businesses to fund awards for parents whose children have 100% attendance.
- The vertical tutor groups and house system have certainly contributed to improved relationships between pupils of all ages. However, a few Year 7 pupils observed that they find some Year 11 pupils 'intimidating'. No evidence of this was seen during the inspection and pupils confirmed that staff are always visible around the school.
- Leaders are fully aware, and make sure that pupils are too, that their physical and emotional well-being underpins their happiness in school and their confidence to learn well. The PSHE programme and assemblies cover many relevant topics. Recently, for example, Years 9 to 11 spent a day considering mental health.
- Another strong focus is on e-safety, sexting and other issues raised by modern technology, along with a detailed consideration of bullying. Pupils said that bullying is very rare and that they have never heard racist comments. All the pupils met during the inspection felt safe and secure and it is clear that issues are not swept under the carpet but tackled head-on. Pupils are fully aware of different lifestyles and faiths and showed maturity when discussing homophobia or extremism.
- The success of the PSHE programme is that Year 11 pupils told inspectors they wanted more regular lessons to discuss the many issues they faced. They mentioned their worries about e-safety and wanting even more examination preparation. Leaders assured the inspectors that they would respond to these comments.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. In many lessons, pupils concentrate hard, join in enthusiastically and work well together. Most of them wear their uniform with pride, are polite and considerate and enjoy describing their school life and successes.
- Occasionally, a few pupils do not necessarily disrupt learning but lack the self-motivation to persevere and concentrate, especially if teachers do not notice that they have switched off. Similarly, around school, the great majority of pupils behave sensibly but there is some rough and tumble, always halted speedily by staff.
- Reflecting on the small number of pupils who have little desire to work and achieve, a parent added, correctly, 'I have seen the frustrations the school goes through to steer these pupils in the right direction – it does go the extra mile for them.'
- Another reason that behaviour is not yet outstanding is that leaders and managers still have to work tirelessly to get some pupils into school – attendance would decline if this was not the case. These pupils are mainly those who are disadvantaged, several of whom also have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Funds earmarked for disadvantaged pupils pay for minibuses which pick some of the persistent absentees up in the morning – a very successful initiative, extended this year. Funds pay for school refusers to be supervised taking examinations at home or sessions for parents to understand that regular attendance matters and what they can do about it. The local authority now issues penalty notices quickly, which has also helped to improve attendance.
- Last year, the principal raised the bar in terms of how pupils should behave, generating an increase in fixed-term exclusions. This was followed by a significant decline this year as most pupils responded to the high standards.
- The Bridge is a well-resourced and well-led internal facility supporting pupils identified as at risk of exclusion. As time spent in the Bridge is extremely effective, this resource has also contributed to the decline in exclusions this year. Also, all younger pupils want to 'graduate' at the end of Year 8 and attend the high-status, celebratory event. If their 'engagement in lesson' scores are not high enough, their progress into Year 9 is discussed with their parents or carers.
- The small number of pupils following courses off-site make good progress in their literacy and numeracy skills and their behaviour improves. They take qualifications that match their abilities and last year all of them had future pathways organised for them. The school receives daily updates on attendance and pupils' progress and any welfare issues are shared immediately.
- A member of staff summed up what inspectors sensed during the inspection: 'Pupils are beginning to believe in themselves and have aspirations. They are proud of how much they themselves are developing as learners.'

## Outcomes for pupils

Good

- With the building works finished and a well-balanced curriculum in place, pupils have made good progress overall since September 2016. In several subjects they make rapid progress because the teaching is particularly effective and they enjoy the lessons.
- One Year 11 pupil described her early years in school as 'awful', referring to the learning she and others experienced in the past. Year 11 pupils taking GCSEs in 2016 had only two years studying subjects separately. It is commendable that their progress in GCSE English and mathematics almost matched that seen nationally. Their limited key stage 3 progress in several subjects, particularly science and languages, contributed to their weaker results.
- In key stage 4 English and mathematics this year, pupils' understanding, depth of knowledge and skills required for the new GCSE courses are developing well. Their confidence to carry out and evaluate science experiments is less secure as they had so few science lessons in the past. Those who have chosen to take the three separate sciences are taught in mixed-ability groups. Senior leaders acknowledge that this may not support the most able well enough and will review this for the next academic year.
- The most able pupils made relatively less progress than others in 2016. Leaders have introduced short and long, challenging 'Apex' tasks for these pupils. There is already evidence that these tasks do improve the most able pupils' progress.
- Another difference in achievement in 2016 was that more girls than boys achieved A\* to C grades in both English and mathematics because boys' progress was weaker in English. English teachers focus on the quality of boys' writing but this is not yet the case in all subjects, or in tutor times when discussing the weekly English challenge.
- In 2016, close to 40% of Year 11 disadvantaged pupils were persistent absentees and several of them had very poor attendance. These pupils (and a few non-disadvantaged pupils as well) made much less progress than other pupils in the school and nationally. Outcomes were far better for those who attended regularly.
- This year's increased and successful use of funds for disadvantaged pupils to improve their attendance explains why most of them are now making better progress. Funds also pay for resources that support their learning, such as ingredients for food studies, revision books for examinations or participation in visits and trips.
- The focus on helping disadvantaged pupils to reach their full potential was in place last year but has now been intensified. Staff know these pupils' learning needs well and give them the support they need. This is another reason why the difference between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally has diminished considerably this year.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their starting points. They attend most mainstream classes and some of those based in the ASPie unit make better progress in English, mathematics and science than other pupils.
- The coasting school descriptor, applied to the school last year, was because it 'had not supported its pupils to fulfil their potential' in the last three years. The school is certainly supporting its pupils to fulfil their potential this year. A parent wrote, 'My

child's progress has rocketed since moving from primary school last year.'

- Leaders make sure that Year 11 pupils leave with the qualifications they need to proceed into future education, training or apprenticeships. Disadvantaged pupils' funding pays for them to attend a successful day about careers and their futures. Even in 2016, when there was underachievement in several subjects, all pupils moved on to their chosen options – a higher percentage than seen nationally.

## School details

|                         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Unique reference number | 138895      |
| Local authority         | East Sussex |
| Inspection number       | 10032897    |

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

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Type of school                      | Comprehensive  |
| School category                     | Academy sponsor-led  |
| Age range of pupils                 | 11–16  |
| Gender of pupils                    | Mixed  |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1,122  |
| Appropriate authority               | Academy trust  |
| Chair                               | Tom Attwood  |
| Principal                           | Heidi Brown  |
| Telephone number                    | 01424 730722   |
| Website                             | <a href="http://www.bexhillacademy.org">www.bexhillacademy.org</a>       |
| Email address                       | <a href="mailto:office@bexhillacademy.org">office@bexhillacademy.org</a> |
| Date of previous inspection         | 29–30 April 2015   |

## Information about this school

- The school is sponsored by the Attwood Educational Foundation. Tom Attwood is Chairman of the Trust for Bexhill Academy. He also chairs the Department for Education Academies and Free Schools Board.
- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average except in the current Year 11, where it is well above average. The school has a specialist facility, ASPie, for a small number of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions.
- The school has an area called the Bridge where pupils at risk of exclusion follow programmes to improve their learning and behaviour and to give them the skills to return to mainstream lessons.
- An increasing and above-average number of pupils are disadvantaged.

- Boys slightly outnumber girls in all years except current Year 10.
- Every year, about 35 Year 7 pupils are eligible for catch-up funding (for those who did not attain level 4 in English and/or mathematics at the end of primary school).
- Over 90% of pupils are of White British backgrounds. A well-below-average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- A small number of pupils follow personalised foundation learning, some full time, some part time, at College Central or Sussex Coast College. For medical reasons, a few pupils are tutored at hospital and/or at home.
- 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.
- In 2016, the school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 4 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in over 50 part lessons and tutor sessions. Several of the lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at pupils' books in lessons. They visited the ASPie, the Bridge and the library.
- An inspector attended an assembly. Inspectors met pupils and students informally as they visited parts of the school during breaktimes. They also held meetings with groups of pupils from several years, a group of the most able pupils, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Discussions were held with staff, including senior and middle leaders. The lead inspector met with the trust chair of governors and one other governor. She also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 75 responses to a questionnaire completed by staff and 10 written comments from parents. Only 21 parents responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and only 69 pupils completed an online questionnaire; both proportions were too low to be representative of these groups.

## Inspection team

|                               |                  |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Clare Gillies, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Victoria Kirby                | Ofsted Inspector |
| Peter Swan                    | Ofsted Inspector |
| Paul Murphy                   | Ofsted Inspector |
| Pat Slonecki                  | 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](http://www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings).

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