

Sandon Primary Academy

Normacot Grange Road, Meir, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST3 7AW

Inspection dates

11–12 July 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The inspirational headteacher is a key driving force behind the exceptional quality of education. Her compelling vision is shared by leaders, governors and staff. As a result, a culture of high expectations and innovation permeates the school.
- Other senior and middle leaders are highly effective. They focus relentlessly on improving teaching.
- Leaders have created an ethos in which pupils have a deep sense of pride and identity. Pupils bring alive the 'Sandon rock' motto of 'Respect yourself, respect others and take responsibility for your actions.'
- The trust and the governing body are astute, knowledgeable and committed. They provide a high level of support and challenge to leaders.
- Pupils of all abilities make excellent and sustained progress across the school. On entry to the early years, starting points are often below typical levels. By the end of key stages 1 and 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standards are above national levels.
- Disadvantaged pupils experience extremely strong teaching. They make exceptional progress, often better than others nationally.
- Teachers are forward-thinking and highly creative. They love teaching, know their pupils as individuals and provide precise support.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make high rates of progress. While the additional support these pupils receive is excellent, it is not measured for impact with sufficient effectiveness.
- Teachers' subject knowledge in English and mathematics is a strength. As a result, pupils are confident and precise in their reading, writing and mathematical work.
- The curriculum is packed full of relevant and meaningful activities that fire pupils' imaginations. The on-site farm and reptile room are used incredibly well to deepen pupils' learning across the curriculum. The teaching of music is not as strong as other curriculum subjects.
- Children get off to a flying start in the early years. Inspirational teaching provides children with the foundation upon which to thrive. They are exceptionally well prepared for Year 1.
- Leaders and staff have formed an impressive partnership with parents. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and support their pupils with learning at home.
- Pupils' social, emotional and personal development is outstanding. Relationships between staff and pupils are superb. Consequently, pupils are friendly, curious and extremely well mannered.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the quality of teaching and the opportunities provided for pupils in music.
- Further develop the systems for measuring the impact of additional support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher is unwavering in her drive to achieve the very best for pupils. She has developed a compelling vision whereby the school is at the heart of the community that it serves. Under her leadership, the school has blossomed into a place that offers a first-class education for pupils. She has created an aspirational environment for learning, where pupils aim high and make unforgettable memories. Consequently, pupils' academic development and social and emotional well-being are exceptionally well catered for. Sandon Primary is an extraordinary school and one that has much to share with others.
- The headteacher and the two deputy headteachers make an excellent senior team. They are forward-thinking and have a constant focus on improvement. Senior leaders understand the needs of pupils, families and staff very well. This leads to precise self-evaluation and swift, successful response to areas of relative weakness.
- Senior leaders nurture the talent of teachers and support them to become successful middle leaders. Middle leaders mentor other teachers to improve particular aspects of their teaching. The support for newly qualified teachers ensures that they become very effective teachers in a short space of time. Both leaders and teachers speak very positively about this professional support.
- Leaders continually review the quality of teaching for its effectiveness. Teachers are responsive to the precise feedback that they receive and quickly make any necessary refinements to their teaching. This positive and forward-thinking culture, twinned with successful professional development, leads to sustained strong teaching across the school.
- Performance management is robust and fair. Teachers welcome the ambitious targets that are set for them. There are clear procedures to support any teaching that does not meet the school's required standard. Leaders' tenacity in this area ensures that high standards of teaching are consistently maintained.
- Leaders and staff analyse assessment information with absolute precision. They swiftly pick up any pupils who might need a boost to their progress. As a result, despite any challenges that they might face, no child is left behind.
- The school's curriculum is rich, relevant and highly creative. It sparks pupils' interest so that they are excited and want to learn. Teachers plan opportunities that enable pupils to make deep connections about the world around them. For example, in Year 5's topic 'Proud to be a potter', pupils immersed themselves in the Stoke-on-Trent 'City of Culture' bid. Pupils learned about the history of the city, famous people and different aspects of heritage, such as pottery and oatcakes. Staff also use the impressive on-site farm, vegetable patch and reptile room to teach subjects like science and cooking. Pupils develop a broad range of skills, knowledge and understanding because of the school's innovative and stimulating curriculum. Leaders are aware that opportunities in the curriculum for music are not as well developed as for other subjects.
- Leaders have successfully developed a shared vision of the importance of school with parents through excellent communication. Leaders and teachers ensure that parents

are well informed about their child's learning, so that they can support them at home. Parents value education and have high aspirations for their children's success. All parents who completed Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View, answered that they would recommend the school.

- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to enable the significant proportion of disadvantaged pupils to excel. Additional teachers are employed to provide extra support in class for pupils. Furthermore, funding has been used to develop the wider curriculum and outdoor learning opportunities.
- Special educational needs funding is used highly productively. Leaders are skilled and involve parents in the process of identification and ongoing support. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive precise teaching in class and, by the end of key stage 2, their progress is above national figures. Leaders agree that they do not measure regularly enough some of the additional support provided to this group of pupils to judge its impact. This would enable leaders to further accelerate the progress for this group and also to know which type of additional support is successful.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the promotion of fundamental British values are key strengths of the school. Pupils want to be like 'Sandon rock' whereby they all demonstrate the values, 'Respect myself, respect others and take responsibility'. These values transfer into pupils' attitudes and behaviours around school. Pupils also have mature moral viewpoints because of the moral dilemmas that they discuss in class together. Furthermore, pupils show tolerant views of other faiths and cultures.
- Leaders have put the physical education (PE) and sport premium to excellent use. In the main, funding is used to employ specialist coaches to improve the delivery of PE lessons and extra-curricular clubs. Coaches support teachers who are new to the profession to refine aspects of their subject knowledge. For example, during the inspection, a specialist dance teacher was working with classes across the school. Coaches are good role models and pupils respond well to them.
- The local authority provides regular and useful support to the school. External consultants also conduct reviews regularly, and these highlight appropriate actions for the school.

Governance

- The governance of the school is highly effective. The trustees and the local governing body are highly skilled and knowledgeable. Governors:
 - are completely committed to school improvement and are a significant part of the school's success
 - provide sharp and thoughtful challenge to leaders
 - know the school community and its leaders extremely well
 - are astute and ask pertinent questions of leaders when probing information about pupils' progress and attainment
 - provide excellent scrutiny of the spending and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

- have educational expertise which provides strong quality assurance of leaders' self-evaluation.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a strong culture for safeguarding because staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils are safe and well cared for. Staff receive regular training on all aspects of safeguarding and child protection. Leaders then make sure that staff can demonstrate understanding of key safeguarding procedures.
- All staff place the utmost priority on securing the safety and well-being of pupils. They have a clear understanding of the different signs that might indicate that a child is at risk. Staff are quick to record and respond to any concerns.
- Leaders are tenacious at following up concerns. Record-keeping is thorough and leaders make excellent use of a range of external services to support pupils' safety. If leaders feel that a particular external service is not providing effective support, then they challenge it.
- Leaders and office staff ensure that thorough checks are carried out on the adults in school. Policies, procedures and record-keeping are well organised and efficient.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- In all year groups, teaching is excellent. Teachers display energy and spark in the classroom. Their infectious attitudes rub off positively on pupils, who thrive under the guidance of their teachers.
- Staff implement whole-school policies focused on planning, teaching and assessment consistently well. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them. Teachers plan lessons that ignite pupils' imaginations, while also providing them with a high level of challenge. There is no ceiling on learning, so pupils of all abilities make sustained progress in a range of subjects. During the inspection, a pupil commented to an inspector, 'Come up to Year 6 – the work is through the roof.' This typifies the culture of high expectations across the school.
- Teachers' use of assessment during lessons is a striking characteristic of the outstanding teaching at Sandon Primary Academy. In every class, staff ensure that pupils' work builds on prior learning. Teachers intervene with clarity during lessons, either by providing consolidation for pupils or by pushing them on to more challenging work. Teachers' questioning is precise and open-ended. It encourages pupils to think for themselves and solve problems. As a result, pupils are deeply involved in the learning process.
- Teachers' subject knowledge in English is secure and promotes a high level of literacy among pupils. The school's work to improve grammar, punctuation and spelling has been highly successful. Pupils' written work shows that they have a good grasp of these skills. Furthermore, teachers share ambitious language with pupils extremely well

and pupils are challenged to keep improving their word choices.

- Pupils read with fluency and confidence because of the school's wide-ranging reading strategies. Phonics is taught very well because staff have highly developed subject knowledge. Pupils are taught pure sounds with precision and accuracy. As pupils move through school, they read widely and often, developing a love of reading and an awareness of different authors. Pupils acquire a secure understanding of what they are reading because teachers provide regular opportunities to develop higher-level comprehension skills, such as inference.
- Teachers inspire confidence and enjoyment in pupils when they teach mathematics. Pupils can calculate mentally and on paper with fluency and accuracy. In one lesson, pupils carried out challenging calculations and were highly motivated to 'crack the code' and solve the problems related to their topic on 'Star Wars'. Teachers ensure that pupils apply their skills and understanding through problem-solving and reasoning on a regular basis. Consequently, standards in mathematics are high.
- The quality of teaching in other subjects is also stimulating and interesting, although the teaching of music is not as strong as in other subjects. Teachers join subjects together creatively through exciting topics, or they teach subjects discretely where it is needed. The quality of work seen in pupils' topic books is excellent. Pupils acquire skills, knowledge and understanding particularly strongly in art, history and science.
- The learning environment is remarkable. Staff have brought the walls of the building alive with pupils' high-quality work. The 'growth tree' in the key stage 1 corridor is a prime example, where pupils' rapid progress in writing is shown from the start of the year to the latest piece of writing. Pupils are proud of their work on display. Teachers are also highly skilled at using displays in the classroom to further develop pupils' understanding during lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Sandon Primary Academy is a special place where pupils are put at the heart of every decision. Pupils are immensely proud of themselves and their school. They are treated equally by staff and given responsibility. As a result, they love school and grow up with a strong sense of identity and self-worth.
- Teachers instil a sense of determination and perseverance among pupils. Consequently, pupils have high aspirations to do well in learning and in life. They work with diligence and confidence in lessons, and these attributes have a strong impact on their progress.
- Staff place a significant focus on pupils' personal development and well-being. Everyone's efforts are focused on modelling high standards, meeting pupils' needs and getting the best out of them. Relationships at all levels are strong. Consequently, pupils are presented with consistent expectations and see adults as positive role models. One of the school's mantras, 'You have to learn to be happy before you can be happy to learn', pervades the school.

- Leaders and staff have designed an innovative environment to support all pupils. For example, there is an established and impressive farm, cookery room, vegetable patch, putting green and village of Tudor houses. During the inspection, a group of pupils were skilfully taken through a cooking session. Pupils decided they wanted to cook soup, picked the ingredients and went through the full process of preparing and cooking the soup before serving it to visitors. All pupils are reaping the rewards of these meaningful experiences, but particularly those pupils who have additional social and emotional needs.
- Pupils trust the adults in school to keep them safe. They say that bullying is very rare, but they know what to do if they see it taking place or if it happens to them. Staff provide frequent opportunities for pupils to learn about safety. Pupils can talk confidently about how they stay safe online and when they are out in the community.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils are overwhelmingly polite, well mannered and friendly. Their conduct around school and in lessons is impeccable. Disruptive behaviour is exceptionally rare but when it does happen, there are highly effective systems in place to deal with it swiftly and appropriately. Staff manage behaviour in class with skill and sensitivity. Consequently, lessons flow effortlessly.
- Leaders track and monitor behaviour thoroughly. They are able to respond to the individual needs of pupils and put in the relevant support when a pupil is not managing their behaviour. The school is not without its challenges. Some pupils have complex needs but they are extremely well catered for. There is clear evidence that the rare behaviour incidents and fixed-term exclusions are reducing over time.
- Attendance has risen steadily year on year and is now above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is also above the national average for all pupils. Leaders are quick to spot patterns or unexplained absence. Equally, they are quick in their response to either support or challenge families to improve their attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Academic standards have been high across the school for a number of years. Most children enter Reception at a level below what is typical for their age. By the end of key stages 1 and 2, a high proportion of pupils achieve the expected standard when compared with the national average. In 2016, at the end of Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics, progress scores were among the highest in the country.
- In 2017, the school's assessment information and the work in pupils' books show that in every year group pupils make outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. As a result, standards continue to rise in these subjects.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard for the phonics screening check in Year 1 has been high for several years. While standards in the current Year 1 are slightly lower than in previous years, leaders can still point to the very good

development of these pupils' phonics skills since September 2016.

- In 2016, the progress of pupils in key stage 1 was not as rapid as it usually is. Leaders quickly identified that some pupils were not being tracked closely enough from their exit points in the early years. Staff have responded well to this and have a much sharper understanding of pupils who require additional support. The previous slight dip in pupils' progress has been reversed this academic year and pupils in key stage 1 are making rapid and sustained progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils across the school, including those who are most able, make outstanding progress because leaders and teachers monitor their progress with tenacity. In 2016, at the end of key stage 2, the progress that this group of pupils made in reading, writing and mathematics was exceptional.
- The most able pupils make strong progress because teachers plan work that challenges them. Current assessment information and the work in books shows that more pupils are achieving at a higher standard than in the last academic year.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive high-quality teaching in class and through additional support. Systems used to identify pupils are robust and, as a result, they make excellent progress from their starting points.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Leaders and staff show a high level of ambition for children at the very start of their journey at Sandon Primary Academy. Staff provide an outstanding level of care, encouragement and teaching, which sets children up exceptionally well for Year 1. Children build positive relationships, attitudes and skills for the future because of strong leadership, imaginative teaching and an inspirational learning environment.
- Children enter Reception with starting points that are below what is typical for their age. They make rapid progress and by the end of the year a larger proportion reach a good level of development than the national average. Disadvantaged children also make strong progress from their starting points because well-spent additional funding provides incisive additional support.
- Leaders have been highly effective in securing the very best provision in the early years. They hold teachers to account and help to improve practice by creating a culture of reflection. Teachers respond well to suggested improvements, which helps the provision to get better and better.
- Leaders and staff make highly effective use of assessment information. Staff use careful observations of children's learning in order to plan future learning that meets the individual needs of children. For example, staff have identified that speech and language is an area of specific need and they skilfully weave it into provision. Leaders and staff also use assessment information well to make sure that no children get left behind.
- Children's excellent progress is down to the superb teaching that they receive. Staff plan activities that are exciting, challenging and imaginative. Tasks are often open-ended to foster children's curiosity and creativity. For example, during the inspection, children were making their own oatcake recipes from fresh ingredients and then writing high-quality sentences to describe their food. As a result of the vibrant teaching,

children love learning and develop a broad range of skills.

- The curriculum provides children with unforgettable experiences. Staff design meaningful topics that leave pupils with a sense of awe and wonder about the world around them. For example the current topic, 'All about Stoke-on-Trent', enables children to build a deep connection to their community. During the inspection, children were excited when learning about the heritage of their city. For example, among a range of relevant activities, they used clay to make their own pottery and designed their own artwork using the style of a famous local potter.
- Staff have developed a vibrant and stimulating learning environment for children, both in the classroom and in the outdoor area. The range of resources spark children's interests and imaginations. More importantly, the environment is used to deepen children's learning. For example, outside in the mud kitchen, children put language to sensory experience, using words like 'slippery', 'squishy' and 'rough'.
- Staff's positive behaviour management leads to outstanding behaviour among the children. Children know from the outset that it is special to be like 'Sandon rock' and display the school's values of respect and responsibility. Children care for one another, follow instructions and shows high levels of independence. They also demonstrate impressive levels of concentration and cooperation. Children's positive behaviour and learning habits have strong impact on their progress.
- Parents are deeply involved in their child's learning in Reception because staff involve them at every opportunity. For example, parents contribute to their child's baseline assessment on entry, they write on the 'family learning tree' when their child has achieved something new at home and they attend celebration events on a regular basis. Strong parental partnerships help to further secure children's rapid progress.
- The well-being and safety of pupils is at the heart of the setting. All statutory welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	140872
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10032642

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	406
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Ian Bagnall
Headteacher	Rachel Beckett
Telephone number	01782 319 097
Website	www.sandonprimaryacademy.com
Email address	info@сандонprimary.org.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 is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is well above the national average.
- A large majority of pupils come from a White British background.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics for pupils by the end of Year 6.
- The school is a converter academy and part of the Sandon Trust, which includes Sandon Primary Academy and The Grange Nursery School.
- The headteacher also leads The Grange Nursery School. The nursery school is inspected separately.
- The headteacher is a national leader of education.
- There is a local governing body at the school which takes responsibility for challenging and supporting leaders to develop educational outcomes for pupils, as well as being a link to the local community.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in 21 lessons or parts of lessons. A number of these observations were undertaken with senior leaders.
- The inspectors scrutinised work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read. They met with two groups of pupils to gain their views of the school. The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktime, lunchtime and at the end of the school day, as well as in lessons.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and other leaders. The lead inspector also met with several teachers, as well as four members of the local governing body and four members of the trust, including the chairs.
- The inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including assessments and records of pupils' progress, the school's checks and records relating to safeguarding, child protection and attendance, records of how teaching is monitored and the school's improvement plans.
- Inspectors took account of 15 responses to Parent View. Inspectors considered 14 free-text responses from parents. They also talked to parents at the start and end of the school day.

Inspection team

Matt Meckin, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Wayne Simner	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Hinton	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Melanie Callaghan-Lewis	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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