

Mount Grace School

Church Road, Potters Bar, EN6 1EZ

Inspection dates 23-24 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Standards in some key subjects do not always meet national averages.
- Some students do not make enough progress during their time at the school.
- The sixth form requires improvement because some students do not reach high enough standards.
- Not enough teaching in the school is good or better.
- Teachers' marking in books does not always explain to students in enough detail how to improve their work.
- Teachers' planning of lessons does not always make sure that work is set at the right levels for all students.
- A small minority of students disrupt some lessons.
- Leaders and teachers do not always ensure that quality of teaching is good enough in all subjects.
- Governors do not always challenge school leaders well enough about the quality of teaching.

The school has the following strengths

- Teaching in some subjects, for example in physical education, is good.
- The school uses its specialism in vocational education well to improve the skills and understanding of students and prepare them well for the world of work.
- The range of subjects and other activities provided by the school gives students a suitably broad and balanced education.
- Students at the school say they feel safe and cared for.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 42 lessons. Three of these were joint observations with the headteacher and a deputy headteacher.
- Students' work in books was scrutinised.
- Records and logs about students' behaviour, safety and attendance were analysed.
- Data and information about students' performance in public examinations, including recent module tests, were analysed.
- The minutes of governors' meetings and school improvement plans were examined.
- Inspectors listened to the views of students and parents, 110 of whom responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View), and staff. They held discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body, school leaders and support staff.

Inspection team

James McAtear, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Robert Ridout

Additional Inspector

Alan Jarvis

Additional Inspector

Susan Aspland

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mount Grace School is an average size secondary school.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who are of minority ethnic heritage or who speak English as an additional language is below that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides funding for children in the care of the local authority and for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is above average.
- The proportion of pupils requiring extra help at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school makes use of Further Education College provision for a small number of students.
- The school does make limited use of early entry for GCSE examinations.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum level expected for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Mount Grace converted to become an academy school on August 1 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan lessons that consistently set work at the correct level for all students
 - ensuring that teachers' marking explains regularly and in detail how students can improve their work.
- Improve achievement by:
 - ensuring that leaders of key subjects, such as mathematics, follow up the tracking of students' progress by providing effective support so that students who may be falling behind are able to improve more rapidly
 - ensuring that the teaching methods used in the sixth form help students to work without being too reliant on help from adults.
- Improve behaviour by ensuring that a small minority of students do not disrupt lessons through:
 - ensuring that all teachers, including teachers new to the school, are clear about what the school's policies and procedures for managing behaviour are and that they apply these consistently.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that improvement plans are much more sharply focused on precisely how to improve the performance of individual teachers
 - ensuring that the training activities undertaken by the teachers are well matched to their strengths and weaknesses as teachers and to the needs of the students
 - checking to make sure that professional development given to teachers is effective in terms of improving the progress students make
 - ensuring that when departments track the progress of students they do this accurately and

follow up quickly to help those who may have fallen behind

- ensuring that governors monitor how well plans to improve teaching standards are being put into practice.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students start at the school with standards of attainment that are below the national average. Most students make the progress expected of them, but some students do not always do so in all subjects. For example, standards in languages and sometimes in humanities are below average. The progress of students is not always tracked sufficiently often or accurately enough. Consequently, the school is not as effective as it could be in helping some students to stay on track.
- In some subjects, for example, art and design, attainment levels are high in comparison to national levels.
- Standards reached by students in the sixth form are variable. For example, while examination results for students achieving A*-E grades are around national averages for A2, those at AS are below national averages. In some sixth form lessons, students are too reliant on adult support and do not make as much progress as they should.
- The progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs is inconsistent. Those with statements of special educational needs make more progress than many other students. Those supported at school action make progress similar to that of others and those at school action plus do not make as much progress as others.
- A very small number of students make use of the specialist provision for medical and other needs available at the school. These students make progress at rates comparable to other students in the school.
- The school makes limited use of early entry for GCSE examinations. This does not limit the progress made by more able students as it is used in English literature and for languages linked to students' ethnic heritage.
- The achievement of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is improving and leaders are very clear about the amount and quality of support provided. The gap in attainment compared with that of other students is closing.
- In lessons where the content or the methods used by the teacher are more interesting, students respond enthusiastically. This is often the case in English, for example. In other lessons, some students become bored when the methods used are not stimulating. At such times these students do not make enough progress.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Records held by the school's senior staff indicate that teaching is improving. However, it is still the case that not enough teaching is good or outstanding.
- In lessons where teachers plan carefully to set the right level of work for all students, the atmosphere in the class helps students learn. However, not all teachers plan well enough to meet the needs of students from across the whole range of abilities.
- Some teachers deepen students' thinking by asking probing questions. For example, in one

lesson students were asked, 'What would the impact of setting this kind of objective be in a business?' However, in other lessons, opportunities to challenge students' thinking are sometimes missed.

- Marking, for example in A level mathematics, is sometimes used well to show students how to improve their work. In too many cases, though, it is not regular or detailed enough to help them. There are some cases where books are hardly marked at all. This is having some impact on the teaching of literacy and mathematics because a consistent approach to the correction of students' work is not applied through the marking students receive in their books.
- Other adults who support students with their learning do a good job in creating a positive atmosphere for learning and in helping students make progress in lessons.
- Teaching methods in the sixth form do not always give students the opportunity to apply their own learning without direct support from adults to tasks that will deepen their learning.
- Many teachers set a variety of tasks for students. This maintains their interests and wastes no time because as soon as one task is finished another is given to help them learn more.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The vast majority of students move safely and sensibly around the school. They are friendly and mix well together at break and lunchtimes. Students say they feel safe at school and feel cared for by the adults. Attendance levels are close to the national average.
- Bullying of any kind is rare. When it does happen, it is dealt with well by staff. The school's records indicate that racist incidents are very rare and that the school deals with them effectively. Students understand the dangers of different forms of bullying including homophobic and cyber bullying and are well equipped to deal with them.
- A small number of students disrupt learning in some lessons. When this happens it causes frustration to other students and is not always confidently dealt with by some teachers. In these cases some teachers either do not seem clear on what the school's approaches are to managing the disruption of learning or are not effective enough in applying the school's practices and procedures.
- The school provides support for students who need to improve their behaviour through its support units 'The Oasis' and 'The Retreat'. It also make effective use of its partnership with local further education colleges. Although they are used by only a small number of students they have found the help they receive useful in getting their behaviour back on track.
- School records indicate that the pattern seen during the inspection is reflected over time. These show that many teachers manage behaviour skilfully and maintain very positive relationships. The comments of students indicate that a few teachers are less able to do this well. The responses received on Parent View, the online survey form used by Ofsted, indicate that parents feel students are safe in school, and reflect few concerns about behaviour.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders have made notable, recent improvements in the rigour with which they monitor the

quality of lessons. Although some of these improvements have taken place recently they are bringing about improvements in the work of teachers. The judgment of senior leaders about lesson quality is accurate and in many cases staff receive high quality feedback.

- Most training activities are effective. However, some are not all as well matched as they should be to the needs of the teachers. The extent to which managers check that this training is having a positive impact on the learning of the students requires further improvement.
 - Departmental leaders are not consistent in the accuracy and frequency with which they track students' progress. They do not always make sure those students who may have fallen behind catch up quickly enough to make good progress. Similarly, not enough is done to ensure consistency in the application of the school's behaviour policies by all teachers.
 - Leaders work well with partner sixth form institutions to provide a broader range of subjects and courses than would otherwise be available to their students. The school provides a suitably broad and balanced range of activities that makes effective provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of students. For example, enrichment opportunities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and challenge weeks have allowed students to enjoy a wide range of experiences outside the classroom.
 - Leaders and managers have built good relationships with parents, the vast majority of whom say they would recommend the school to others.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have provided strong support for the school in examining carefully its plans to improve achievement and examination results. Although they provide useful challenge to the school about the data they receive on the students' performance, for example at GCSE level in mathematics, they have not always provided enough challenge about its work to improve teaching standards. More recently, this challenge has been clearer in its support for the more robust system of performance management and monitoring that is being implemented in the school. Governors have been effective in ensuring that the use of pupil premium funding is helping those for whom it is intended.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137224
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	406662

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1004
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	163
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Daniel
Headteacher	Peter Baker
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01707 655512
Fax number	01707 621298
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