

The George Eliot School

Raveloe Drive, Nuneaton, CV11 4QP

Inspection dates 13–14 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
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

- Senior managers and governors' view of the school's performance is too generous. There is no doubt that school leaders have had a positive impact on improving teaching, achievement and behaviour. However, more needs to be done in all areas before the school can be judged outstanding.
- Students who are sent to the inclusion centre are not always given appropriate work. Consequently, the quality of their learning in the centre is not good.
- While teaching is mostly good, the teaching of reading requires improvement, particularly in subjects other than English.
- All statutory requirements for safeguarding students are met and appropriate policies are in place, but the school does not demonstrate best practice in recruitment and personnel management.
- While most classrooms are well-ordered and are stimulating places to learn in, a small number are untidy. Some teachers do not promote or demonstrate high enough standards of presentation.

The school has the following strengths

- Achievement is good. Considering their starting points, most students make good progress in their studies. They do particularly well in improving their writing skills.
- Teaching is usually good. The school operates a six-hour teaching day, which is longer than usual. This enables all students to benefit from extra support when they need it, along with a good range of enrichment activities.
- The school has changed the Key Stage 4 curriculum to give a much stronger emphasis on academic GCSE examinations. This is helping to raise standards.
- Attendance has improved considerably and is above average. Behaviour is good; the school works hard to keep students motivated and involved with their education. Pupils feel very safe.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 28 lessons, where they considered the quality of teaching and looked at work in students’ books. Eight of these lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Shorter visits were made to a number of other lessons and activities.
- Account was taken of 268 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) along with 28 replies to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at important documents, including examination results and records of students’ assessments. They assessed the school’s policies for safeguarding and examined procedures for recruitment and personnel management.
- Inspectors met with members of the governing body. They also held discussions with staff, students, and a director of the academy trust.

Inspection team

Mark Phillips, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Paul Cuthbert

Additional Inspector

Christine Young

Additional Inspector

Chris Fallon

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- George Eliot School is a smaller than average secondary school for students aged between 11 and 16 years.
- Most students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra funding given to the school by the government) is above the national average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action, and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are above the national average.
- Most students join at the start of Year 7, although an above-average number join other year groups. A number of these students have been excluded or disaffected in their previous schools.
- The school meets the government floor standards, which are minimum requirements for students' academic achievement.
- A small number of students receive part of their education at other institutions, including North Warwickshire and Hinckley College (NWHC).
- The school opened as a sponsored academy on 1 September 2011, replacing a National Challenge trust school. The sponsor is the North Warwickshire and Hinckley College (NWHC).

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The school should ensure that self-evaluation reflects a realistic balance of its strengths and weaknesses. This should take full account of the performance of schools across the country, not just locally.
- The academy trust, governing body and senior leadership team should undertake a review of the school's practices for recruitment and personnel management. This review, and any action leading from it, should be completed by 15 April 2013.
- Students sent to the inclusion centre should always be provided with work that challenges them and helps them continue good progress in their learning.
- Teachers of all subjects should take every opportunity to help students to improve their reading skills, including through the use of phonics.
- Standards of presentation should be improved by:
 - making sure that all teachers insist on high standards of presentation in students' books
 - making sure that all teachers demonstrate good presentation when using whiteboards and other visual resources
 - making sure that all classrooms are well-organised so that they provide a visually stimulating and positive learning environment.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The great majority of parents and carers say that their children are making good progress at George Eliot School. Inspectors agree. The quality of learning seen through lesson observations and work in books confirmed that achievement is good. However, it is not outstanding, as the school proposed.
- The majority of students arrive at George Eliot having achieved below-average standards in their previous schools. Some have very poor standards of reading and writing. Most make good progress by the time they leave Year 11.
- Students are entered for GCSE examinations in English and mathematics in November or January of Years 10 and 11. The aim is to give them confidence when preparing and taking examinations; this also helps teachers to set them even more ambitious targets. It is an effective strategy because many students improve their grades when they re-sit in the summer term.
- Progress in English language is good, particularly with writing. It is to the school's credit that almost all students take GCSE English Literature, although standards in this subject are below average. More could be done to develop high standards of reading in lessons across the curriculum. This includes better use of phonics, to help students better understand how words are formed and how they should sound.
- In mathematics, some students do very well indeed. However, those of middle ability did not do as well in the 2012 examinations and, on average, the girls attained lower grades than the boys. Variability was also reflected in the quality of mathematics teaching observed by inspectors.
- Most disabled students and those who have special education needs make good progress, although the small number on 'school action plus' did not achieve as well as others in the 2012 examinations.
- The proportion of students achieving the equivalent of five A* to C GCSE grades in 2012 was broadly average, but significantly higher than expected. Many students gained some of these high grades through BTEC examinations; fewer took academic GCSE subjects than is the case in schools nationally. Current Year 10 and 11 students are studying a much better selection of subjects. Examinations already passed, and the school's tracking data, suggest that these students are making good progress. Standards are in line with national averages in most subjects. This was confirmed by evidence seen in lessons during the inspection.
- While the new curriculum places strong emphasis on GCSEs that were to qualify for the English Baccalaureate, students can complement these with a wide range of other subject choices. These options are popular. For example, the proportion of students studying GCSE music is around twice the national average.
- Around a third of all students qualify for the pupil premium funding. The school is using this money to provide additional tuition in English and mathematics, to reduce class sizes, and to staff the sixth teaching hour. Although these students scored an average of six points (a whole GCSE grade) lower than the rest of the year group in the 2012 GCSE examinations, they still made good progress considering their very low starting points.
- Good curriculum links exist between the school and NWHC, including through the Midlands

Academy Trust. The attendance and progress of students attending courses at other institutions is monitored carefully, and they make similar progress to other students in the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is usually good. It is not outstanding because a minority of lessons require improvement and not enough are outstanding. Generally, lessons are well-organised; most are taught in classrooms that are attractive, well-resourced, and which promote good learning. In the best lessons, students' interest and enthusiasm are captured by engaging demonstration and questioning. For example, in a science lesson, students were fascinated when the teacher showed how the temperature a wire changes as increasing amounts of electricity are passed through it. Skilful questioning about real-life situations involving electricity, including the use of mobile telephone chargers, helped to deepen students' understanding further.
- The school operates a six-hour teaching day for all, longer than is commonly found in secondary schools. The sixth teaching hour is used for a combination of enrichment activities, intervention work and study support. All of these opportunities help to promote students' good achievement.
- Most teachers use a good balance of instruction, questioning and group work. Most books are marked regularly. The 'teacher question, student answer' style of marking, used by some teachers, is very effective in helping students to understand how they could improve their work.
- A clear policy for identifying errors in spelling and punctuation is helping to drive up standards in literacy, but less attention is given to challenging poor presentation of other work in books – for example, mathematical calculations and scientific experiments. Furthermore, a small number of teachers do not model good presentation. Inspectors observed isolated examples of shoddy whiteboard presentation in class, poor wall displays and untidy classrooms.
- Working relationships in classrooms are very good. Students' moral and social development is promoted very well. Although opportunities are provided to extend their knowledge of different cultures, their cultural understanding is less well developed.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students behave well in lessons and as they move around the school site. Most show very positive attitudes to learning. This is a considerable achievement, particularly for those who arrive at the school with negative experiences of education. The school has comprehensive systems for logging and analysing incidents of poor behaviour and negative attitudes, and these systems are used well to keep parents informed about their child's personal development. Parents and staff are very positive about the way that the school promotes good behaviour.
- Attendance has improved considerably and is now above the national average. This is as a result of effective monitoring by the attendance officer, form tutors and directors of learning. Good links exist with the Police Community Support Officer and other external agencies.
- Students feel very safe at school, a view shared by their parents. Both say that bullying is rare. The school makes good efforts to eliminate discrimination, and particularly to challenge homophobic attitudes.
- The school has not excluded a single student, either temporarily or permanently, since May 2012. Previously, above-average numbers had been excluded from the academy and predecessor school. Now, when students behave in a way that requires removal from lessons,

they are sent to an inclusion centre on the school site. This ensures they are kept involved and safe in school rather than sitting at home, or roaming in the locality. However, the quality of work set for them in the centre is not good enough. The work is often trivial or too easy, and therefore the effectiveness of this behaviour strategy is not as good as it should be.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders and governors have detailed knowledge of students, their families and the school's locality. The school is rich in data and this is used well to update parents about students' progress. However, leaders and managers' understanding of the national education scene is not as strong. One reason why self-evaluation is over-generous is because it compares the academy too much with the predecessor school and other local institutions, rather than with schools nationally.
 - The Principal leads the school with determination and a strong sense of purpose. He has set high expectations for the academic standards that he expects students to achieve. He is supported by an experienced senior team and an enthusiastic team of middle leaders. Their effectiveness and commitment is demonstrated by significant improvements in achievement, teaching, attendance and behaviour since the academy opened.
 - Regular lesson observations take place to check on the quality of teaching. Led by the Principal, appropriate decisions are taken that link teachers' pay increases to the success of their work.
 - All statutory requirements for safeguarding students are met and the academy trust has published appropriate policies relating to personnel issues. Inspectors were satisfied that the Principal and senior leaders follow these procedures when they need to, including liaising with external agencies. However, the local governing body has not always been kept informed of these matters in a timely manner.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governance of the school is by the local governing body, which in turn answers to the academy trust. Both benefit from the expertise of members and directors, a number of whom are experienced leaders of education. Meetings of the local governing body are well organised and include consideration of teaching quality. Attention is given to achievement data, and challenging questions are asked of the Principal and senior managers. The academy trust has a sub-committee that undertakes the Principal's performance management; the governing body's finance and resources committee take account of all other staff appraisal. All statutory safeguarding checks were made when the academy opened; however, records from the predecessor school were not checked thoroughly enough when staff were transferred to the employment of the academy trust. Tightening up these procedures, so that the school's approaches to recruitment and personnel management represent best practice, is a key area for improvement.

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	137079
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	399875

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	691
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Laurel Penrose
Principal	David James
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	02476 744000
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