

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School

The Green Road, Ashbourne, DE6 1EP

Inspection dates 24–25 April 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		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

- Students do not achieve well across a range of subjects. Action has been too slow to tackle attainment gaps between groups of students.
- Too few students make good or better progress because targets have been too low.
- The standard of students' presentation and writing is not good enough.
- Teaching is inconsistent but improving. Work set is not always suited to students of different abilities. Marking and feedback does not routinely explain how students' should improve their work.
- Robust systems for checking on teaching quality are new. Some subject leaders do not have the skills to carry out their roles effectively.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders and the governing body are open and honest about weaknesses. The headteacher has acted rapidly to strengthen teaching.
- Improvement plans are effective. Senior leaders and the governing body check progress regularly.
- The sixth form is good and remains a strength of the school.
- Attainment in mathematics, art and design, communication studies and humanities is high. An increasing proportion of students make good or better progress in mathematics.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Relationships between staff and students are strong.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 part lessons, of which eight were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors observed senior leaders reporting back on the quality of learning and students' achievements in lessons.
- One inspector conducted a learning walk to see the provision for disabled students and those with special educational needs.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, a group of teachers and five groups of students. The lead inspector had discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body and two representatives, and the school's improvement partner from the local authority.
- The inspectors took account of the 180 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own survey of parents' views. Responses to questionnaires completed by 81 staff were also analysed and considered.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence including: the school's improvement plan; the analysis of students' progress; records of classroom observation; students' work; and records related to the behaviour and safety of students.

Inspection team

Nada Trikic, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Lawley	Additional Inspector
Phillip Drabble	Additional Inspector
Thelma McIntosh-Clark	Additional Inspector
William Cassell	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Queen Elizabeth's is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school converted to academy status in September 2011. When its predecessor school was last inspected in October 2008 it was judged to be good overall.
- The school has retained links with the local authority.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (the additional funding for children in local authority care and students known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs identified by the school and supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported with a statement of special educational needs or through school action plus is higher than average. The school has a specially resourced provision for 23 students with statements. At the time of the inspection, 19 places were taken.
- The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 access work-based courses off-site in construction and agriculture. The agriculture course is run by Derbyshire Agricultural Rural Training and the construction course is through the Anthony Gell School, Derbyshire.
- The school is a member of the Peak 11 Learning Federation which is a partnership made up of 11 schools; it shares good practice and provides training for staff.
- The governance of the school is undertaken by the governing body and academy board.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.
- A new headteacher was recruited to the school in September 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use assessment to plan tasks that take full account of students' prior attainment, progress information and individual learning needs
 - involve students in assessing their progress so they are clear about their next steps in learning
 - use high quality marking and feedback to give students clear guidance on how to improve
 - set clear expectations for the presentation of work
 - take responsibility for developing the literacy skills of students from Years 7 to 13
 - increase opportunities for students to take responsibility for their learning and progress through independent learning tasks.
- Improve achievement, particularly in English and science, and of low ability boys by setting work at the right level of difficulty for each student and providing the most-able students with enough challenge.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - strengthening subject leadership so that all subject leaders are able to lead teaching, learning and achievement to a high standard
 - improving the achievement of disabled students, those who have special educational needs and students supported by pupil premium, by monitoring teaching and progress more closely so that support can be provided promptly when appropriate

- strengthening the impact of governors in reducing attainment gaps between groups of students and through the performance management of staff.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- When students join the school in Year 7, they are working well above the national average in English and mathematics. In recent years the progress of Year 11 students has not been good enough. In 2012, the proportion of students to achieve five A* to C grades in GCSE including English and mathematics dropped by twelve percentage points. This is explained in part by weaker performance in English, particularly by the boys.
- Until recently the school has not made effective use of pupil premium funding to improve achievement. Last year, the GCSE grades for this group of students were two grades below their peers in mathematics and one grade below in English. The group achieved less well than similar students nationally.
- Pupil premium funding is now used to provide small group and one-to-one sessions to accelerate progress in English and mathematics. This targeted support, with closer checks on progress, is beginning to narrow the attainment gap. It is too soon to assess the effect on students' progress over a period of time.
- A lack of aspiration in students' academic targets have contributed to a mixed picture of performance across subjects and groups of learners. Too few students gain top grades in science subjects. New progress targets this year have added challenge and ambition to the school's work. This is shown in better rates of progress in English and mathematics across different year groups. Intervention strategies have not had the desired effect and have been reviewed.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs who attract enhanced funding achieve as expected, given their complex needs and starting points. Effective transition plans at age 16 ensure successful progression to suitable provision through education and apprenticeship routes.
- The achievement of low ability boys, together with disabled students and those who have special educational needs without statements, requires improvement. Lesson plans do not always take account of their specific learning needs. Checks on students' understanding are not used well enough to support their next steps in learning.
- Students who access off-site vocational courses, such as agriculture, are successful. However, their results are disappointing in English and mathematics. Plans are advanced to integrate work in English and mathematics in the vocational setting to improve GCSE grades.
- The literacy policy sets out in detail how students' skills are to be extended but this is not a high enough priority in lessons. The quality of students' writing, oracy and presentation skills are too variable. The response to an initiative to support wider reading is more positive. Changes to Year 7 work, supported by new targets and 'catch-up' funding, is leading to better progress in English and mathematics.
- Early entry in mathematics is used appropriately and successfully for the 'express group'. These students complete a bridging unit in mathematics to prepare them for advanced study in the sixth form. Following disappointing results in English last year, early entry has been used effectively to provide accurate feedback to students, and to support changes to lesson plans.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress. They enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities that broaden their experiences and prepare them for the future. A high proportion progress to university. Advice and guidance for students who want to consider alternatives to university are less well developed.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching requires improvement because students are not making as much progress as they should. During the inspection, not enough lessons were judged to be good or outstanding.
- Many teachers expect too little from their students, and do not plan for their different learning needs or abilities. Assessment information is not always used effectively to provide enough challenge for students. This means that different groups of students, such as low ability boys, more-able students and students who have special educational needs, do not always make the progress they should.
- Teachers sometimes stick rigidly to their lesson plans, even when feedback gathered from students indicates that some of them are struggling or others are finding the work easy. Students are not routinely involved in assessing their own progress so that they are clear about what to do next. This is a barrier to good progress.
- Not enough teachers provide opportunities and guidance to strengthen literacy skills across the age range. Expectations about the quality of presentation and writing are not set and reinforced across subjects. Too few opportunities are provided for students to practise their oracy skills.
- Teachers talk for too long at times, especially at the start of the lesson. Opportunities are missed to engage and involve students, or to develop their independent learning skills. At times, the language level is too high and not all students understand the purpose of the lesson. Teachers tend to ask questions of students who put up their hands; this can mean that other students are passive in lessons.
- The quality of marking and feedback varies considerably across the school. The best feedback provides clear guidance on how students are to improve their work. This is rare. Too much of the marking reviewed was of poor quality with little to support students' understanding about how to improve.
- Lessons usually get off to a good start because relationships between students and staff are strong. Students are attentive and want to do well. Students enjoy opportunities to work in groups to discuss their learning. They benefit from the use of different resources, such as the interactive whiteboard, to enrich and reinforce their learning.
- Where teaching is good and outstanding, tasks and activities engage and motivate students. There is a good balance of individual and group work, and the level of interaction and challenge is high. Teachers ask probing questions to encourage all students to develop their thinking skills. In these lessons, the pace of learning is brisk because teachers check on students' learning regularly.
- Planning to support the efficient use of additional adults in the classroom to help students' learning and progress is underdeveloped. Input is stronger in the small group and one-to-one sessions with the students identified with complex needs. There is too much withdrawal from lessons for some non-statemented disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good with many examples of outstanding teaching. In the best lessons, teachers encourage students to think deeply about what they are learning and provide excellent opportunities for them to learn independently.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in and around the school is good; students are courteous to one another and almost all show positive attitudes to learning. Expectations for good behaviour have been raised this year and students are responding well. Year 11 students involved in discussions during the inspection were also positive about changes to the uniform and improvements to the house system.
- Students enjoy school. They feel safe, and say that bullying and racist attitudes are rare and dealt with firmly. Students display mature attitudes and respect for different cultures and beliefs. They have good opportunities through personal, social and health education lessons to discuss topical issues, and understand the risks associated with e-safety.
- Opportunities for students to take responsibility and develop leadership skills have increased with the introduction of prefects. Students are proud of the contribution they make to charity fund raising. They welcome initiatives such as mentoring schemes to strengthen links across year groups, and mixed-aged tutor groups in the sixth form.
- Students feel that they are known well by the staff. They appreciate the extra time that teachers provide to support them with their learning. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are well cared for. The school is persistent in seeking help when referrals are made for specialist services, and engage successfully with a wide range of outside agencies.
- Attendance overall is above average. However, this is not the case for all groups of students. Those students identified with special educational needs at school action and school action plus attend less well. Leaders have put measures in place to tackle this situation, but it is too soon to assess the impact.
- Data to track and analyse attendance, absence, exclusions, behaviour incidents, internal isolation and emergency 'call-out' from lessons have been strengthened. Termly updates provide a helpful and visual record, including a breakdown for different groups of students, to support a thorough review of progress.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher took swift action on arrival to strengthen the focus on school improvement, and to raise the aspirations of staff and students. Changes to leadership roles that are tightly focused on teaching and achievement, new appointments, and a drive to improve teaching quality are leading to a renewed vision and ambition for the school. Responses to the staff questionnaire indicate that the vast majority share this.
- The headteacher and the senior team have a high profile around the school to support and reinforce the high standards set. This is appreciated by staff and students.
- A priority is set to make good teaching routine. Robust lesson observation and feedback, training, and support programmes for identified teachers have increased the proportion of good teaching. Leaders are working hard to embed this approach. A base level of teaching quality across the school has been established to track improvements.
- The headteacher has been instrumental in leading an honest, open and accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Improvement plans are detailed with actions carefully monitored to check on students' progress. The quality of subject leadership is variable. Despite training sessions and stronger line management links with senior leaders, the quality remains uneven.

- The leadership and management of disabled students and those identified as having special educational needs require improvement. Careful checks are made on the progress and provision of students with enhanced provision. This is less well developed for other students with learning needs.
- Until this year, performance management arrangements were weak. Teachers now have challenging objectives linked to students' progress and school priorities. Links with pay and progression are now firmly established.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good. The sixth form leader knows the strengths of the sixth form and has a clear view of how to improve it further through a wider range of vocational courses.
- The curriculum requires improvement to better meet the needs of students. Plans are underway to broaden the curriculum through a wider range of subjects to strengthen progression routes across the age range. Staff have received training on how to develop students' literacy skills and descriptors to assess students' progress. However, this work is not sufficiently embedded across the school.
- The school provides good opportunities to promote students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Good links are fostered with the local community, for example through the hosting of events for elderly people, and more widely through exchanges and trips abroad. Assemblies are used effectively to encourage students to make the most of their skills and opportunities, such as through sport and the arts.
- The local authority has played a crucial role in supporting the changeover in the school's leadership. External specialist subject support has been used effectively to ensure the accurate assessment of standards across a number of subjects. Access to subject networks as part of the Peak 11 partnership have increased opportunities for staff to share and develop good practice. Links are developing well with a partner school.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governance of the school has been transformed within a short period of time. Until this year, the governing body did not have access to crucial information about the school's performance to fulfil its role. The process of becoming an academy, recruiting a headteacher and access to training has changed this. Governors now receive high quality information about students' progress and the performance of different groups of students. They now have regular updates on the school's monitoring of teaching quality. Their role in performance management is understood. Governors are challenging senior leaders on progress linked to the school's priorities. It is too soon to see the full impact of their work in narrowing the attainment gaps for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and those supported through pupil premium. Members of the governing body are visiting the school more regularly to contribute their views on the quality of the school's work. Governors ensure that procedures for safeguarding meet requirements, including the appointment of staff.

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	136972
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	413389

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1390
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Griffiths
Headteacher	Anne Martin
Date of previous school inspection	N/a
Telephone number	01335 343685
Fax number	01335 300637
Email address	enquiries@queenelizabeths.derbyshire.sch.uk

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