

Holbrook Academy

Ipswich Road, Holbrook, Ipswich, IP9 2QX

Inspection dates 20–21 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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

- Although achievement is improving, it is still not yet good. Progress in English is not rapid enough and the progress made by some groups, especially boys and more-able students, is less good than others.
- Teaching is not yet consistently good and not enough is outstanding to ensure that all students make at least good progress. Teachers do not consistently devise activities that are suitably challenging for all levels of ability.
- Lessons in many subjects do not develop students' literacy skills sufficiently, in order to accelerate the progress they make in English.
- The targets set for students' achievement are not challenging enough to generate better rates of progress.
- Leaders at all levels do not make enough use of the information they have about students' progress; it is underused to monitor the effectiveness of actions taken to improve the teaching and other aspects of the academy or to inform planning of activities that challenge all students.
- Teachers have too few opportunities to observe each other and share the outstanding practice that exists.

The school has the following strengths

- Achievement is improving across all year groups, especially in Key Stage 3. Achievement in mathematics is good.
- Attendance has improved and is broadly in line with the national average. The number of students with very low attendance has reduced significantly.
- Students' good behaviour makes a positive contribution to learning in lessons and they take on leadership opportunities that are helping to improve the academy.
- Students feel safe and parents are happy that the academy keeps their children safe.
- The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection; inadequate teaching has been eradicated and a far greater proportion is good.
- The new Principal has united staff, governors and parents in a clear vision for the future development of the academy and has strengthened everyone's determination to continue the improvement work.

Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Inspectors gathered and evaluated a wide range of evidence of the academy's work. They also took into account evidence obtained during monitoring visits while the academy was in a category of concern.
- Inspectors observed 17 lessons, of which four were joint observations with academy leaders. In addition, inspectors carried out brief visits to additional lessons as part of two trails, one to gather evidence on the support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs and the other to look at teachers' marking.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including minutes of meetings, safeguarding and health and safety arrangements, policy documents and records of how well students currently in the academy are making progress.
- Meetings were held with the Principal and Vice-Principal, other staff in leadership roles, groups of students and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 97 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Elaine Taylor, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Angela Podmore

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Nearly all students are of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium is below the national average. This is additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and some other groups.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, either with a statement or supported by school action or school action plus, is below average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of students attend off-site provision for part of their learning. This takes place in Hadleigh High School, East Bergholt High School, Newmarket College, Easton and Otley College in Ipswich, at Parkside pupil referral unit in Ipswich, Hadleigh Tyres and Ipswich Town Football Club.
- Holbrook High School became an academy in August 2011. When it was last inspected in March 2012, it was judged to require special measures. Four monitoring visits have taken place since then to evaluate progress.
- A permanent Principal took up his post in September 2013 following interim arrangements put in place when the previous Principal left the academy following the last inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of lessons that are good and outstanding by providing more opportunities for teachers to work together and observe the outstanding practice that exists.
- Increase the rate of progress that all students make in English by:
 - increasing the focus on literacy in all subjects
 - embedding the new marking strategy designed to improve students' spelling and punctuation.
- Ensure that all leaders use the information the academy gathers on students' progress to:
 - set challenging targets for the academy and the students
 - monitor carefully the progress individuals and groups of students are making
 - ensure that teachers devise learning activities with a suitable level of challenge for all abilities, especially the more able.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- When students start at the academy, they have reached standards broadly in line with those found nationally. Many students' literacy levels are lower than those expected for their age.
- Attainment has risen since the last inspection because of better teaching and better monitoring to make sure that students do not fall behind. Standards at the end of Year 11 are now average, which indicates that students make expected progress from their starting points.
- Students make good progress in mathematics, but less than expected progress in English. Teaching in English is not inadequate. Much is good and there is even some outstanding teaching. However, weak literacy levels, especially spelling and punctuation, have a negative impact on the progress that many students make. Students are making better progress in English this year, especially lower-ability students.
- Targets are used to measure and support students' progress as they move through the academy. Until recently, these targets have had insufficient challenge for all levels of ability, especially the most able. The academy has ensured that teachers' assessment is now accurate and, as a result, the targets match individual students' needs more closely. However, this is a relatively recent development so it has not had time to show its full impact.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs receive good support and this is resulting in the gap closing between their achievement and that of other groups of students. This year, three times as many are on track to gain five good GCSE qualifications including English and mathematics.
- Boys make less progress than girls. Students eligible for the pupil premium are still not making as much progress as others. It is difficult to compare their achievement from year to year because of the small numbers involved but, this year, a higher proportion than previously are on track to meet their targets. Nevertheless, these students are still more than a grade behind. Year 7 catch up funding is being used well to improve literacy, and reading ages have increased; in some cases, by over three years.
- Some students take GCSE examinations early in some subjects. The academy selects these students carefully to ensure that the process has no detrimental impact on their achievement.
- The few students who attend alternative provision make good progress because the settings meet their needs well. The academy makes thorough checks to ensure that the students are safe and are making good progress.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- A much greater proportion of teaching is good than at the time of the last inspection. There is no inadequate teaching. Where teachers' absence needs to be covered, an internal cover team ensure that the quality of students' learning does not fall. A growing proportion of teaching is outstanding, but still too little to ensure that all students make consistently good progress.
- In lessons that require improvement, teachers provide all students with work at the same level. Activities do not challenge students sufficiently, especially more-able students. Teachers do not make sufficient use of their good subject knowledge or the information they have from tracking

data when planning their lessons.

- Marking is helpful in guiding students on how to improve their work and, in some cases, students are starting to respond well to the suggestions. Leaders have introduced a new strategy to highlight mistakes of spelling and punctuation in all subjects. This is still developing and not all teachers check that students have corrected their work or learnt from the process.
- Literacy and numeracy are a feature of most lessons now because of new strategies and a new team created to lead this work. Teachers are starting to build opportunities into their lessons but the strategies are not yet fully embedded and regular. Students learn communication skills well, both in and out of lessons with a wide range of leadership opportunities. Opportunities are sometimes missed to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- In the best lessons, students learn new facts, hone their skills or consolidate what they have previously learnt at a good pace throughout the lesson. Teachers choose and plan activities to inspire and interest the students, and both boys and girls engage well. For example, in an outstanding English lesson that was exploring the theme of light in *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, Year 7 students made exceptional progress. By the end of the lesson, they were able to make sophisticated references to links with the history of Victorian England, they could explain and exemplify how the author used different techniques to enhance descriptions and they worked in groups or on their own using a wide variety of resources, including the interactive whiteboard.
- Where good behaviour makes a strong contribution to the good learning in a lesson, the teachers actively promote and reinforce the sort of behaviour that will ensure that they make the most progress. Students are given good opportunities to make decisions for themselves and to work collaboratively in groups or pairs, with regular opportunities to discuss the work. This is having a positive impact on students' speaking skills and deepening their understanding.
- Teachers and other adults work well together in all lessons. As a result, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making much better progress this year. In the most successful examples, the subject-specific skills of learning support assistants are used to encourage and challenge students well.
- At the last inspection parents were very concerned about homework. The academy has worked hard to improve home learning and responses on Parent View confirm a much greater level of satisfaction. Homework makes a positive contribution to students' learning; it is set more regularly and students use their organisers well to keep a record of what they have to do.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The vast majority of students behave well around the academy and in lessons. They are polite, considerate and welcoming.
- Students attend regularly and the academy has worked successfully to reduce the number of students who are persistently absent. Students are punctual at the start of the day and to lessons.
- Students have well-developed social skills. Student ambassadors promote the school well in the local community. They come from all year groups and, along with prefects, are acting as influential leaders and positive role models for others. They have taken on a wide range of responsibilities in subjects such as sport, drama, art, modern languages, design technology and

careers education. They see their role as bringing their chosen subjects 'to the forefront of other students' attention'. Increasingly they are helping to develop the quality of teaching and learning and they attend meetings of the governing body.

- A group of pensioners join the students regularly for lunch and their numbers have been steadily rising. They enjoy the food and the good company of the students.
- Students feel safe in the academy. They know where to turn if they have concerns 'because staff really care', they say. They know how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, such as on the roads, when using the internet or in practical sessions in science.
- Students report that bullying is rare and dealt with well should it occur. They have a good understanding of different types of bullying, such as racism, cyber-bullying and homophobic attitudes.
- The academy has effective systems in place to support vulnerable students and to keep all students safe. Parents have confidence in the academy to do so. A variety of additional activities and a range of external agencies provide high-quality support in developing vulnerable students' self-esteem and social skills.
- A small minority of students need help to manage their own behaviour. The academy has effective systems to support them and disruption of learning is rare. Exclusions are well below average.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The curriculum adequately meets the needs of students of all abilities. At Key Stage 4, the variety and the levels of the courses on offer cater for the majority of students. The academy works in partnership with other schools and providers of work placements to extend opportunities. Leaders recognise that they are not using the freedoms provided by academy status to breathe new life into the current curriculum on offer. There are missed opportunities to strengthen and develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in a wide range of subjects. However, the new curriculum for philosophy, religion and ethics contains many strong features, including a unit designed to counter extremism and discrimination.
- New structures are making the lines of accountability much clearer and supporting more rapid improvements. Communication is regular, detailed and discussions are more open. Leaders have addressed the issues identified at the last inspection. Nevertheless, some groups of students are not making the rapid progress needed to close the gaps between their achievement and that of all students.
- Systems to monitor the quality of teaching are having a positive impact. A programme of subject reviews has started and subject leaders have regular meetings with senior leaders to discuss the progress students are making. These meetings require a sharper focus on whether students are securely on track to meet their targets. Until recently, the systems to gather data on how much progress students were making were weak. Changes made have led to significant improvements, so leaders at all levels now have all the information they need to drive improvements more rapidly.
- The new Principal has strengthened the determination of the whole academy. Staff morale is high. A major success has been the significant increase in the number of parents sharing their views about the academy and taking part in the activities designed to help them support their

children's learning.

- Staff professional development has close links with the performance management and appraisal process, which only rewards good performance. Teachers have clear performance targets linked to the progress students are making in their lessons. Professional development opportunities are in place to meet their individual needs. Training is developing the skills of subject and faculty leaders.
- Self-evaluation is honest and accurate. It provides leaders and governors with the information needed to decide what needs to be done next. This leads to clear development planning. No groups of students are overlooked and leaders actively promote equality throughout the work of the academy.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has a new structure and now provides challenge and support more effectively. All departments have a governor who specifically links with them, and one governor has the specific responsibility to ensure the quality of governance. To that end, governors have completed a thorough self-review. New appointments have ensured that there is an appropriate range of the necessary skills, including financial and educational expertise. Governors are actively involved in the faculty reviews that now take place. Their appointment of the new permanent Principal has been key to the improvements that are taking place. Governors have undertaken training on the interpretation of data and on the development of pay policy. They understand the link between performance and pay, and they challenge underperformance well. Governors gather evidence first hand of the work of the academy and understand well the strengths and areas for improvement. Governors ensure that all safeguarding requirements are met. They monitor the way the pupil premium funding is used, but the analysis of the impact of the spending lacks detail. The academy's website is under review, as it currently has too little information on this and on the curriculum on offer.

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	137208
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	424283

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	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	451
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tim Fenton
Principal	Dr Simon Letman
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2012
Telephone number	01473 328317
Fax number	01473 327362
Email address	office@holbrookhigh.suffolk.sch.uk

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