

# Robert Blake Science College

Hamp Avenue, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 6AW

**Inspection dates** 5–6 December 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Require improvement	3
Leadership and management		Require improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- The quality of teaching has not been consistently high enough to enable all pupils to reach the standards they are capable of.
- In 2013 not enough pupils achieved five A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics.
- Pupils with special educational needs are not always fully supported in their learning. As a result, these pupils do not make as much progress as their peers.
- Work is not always set at the right level to allow pupils of differing abilities to make sufficient progress.
- Some pupils are over reliant on adults and do not take enough responsibility for their own learning.
- There is inconsistency in the effectiveness of leaders responsible for subjects. Some are not ensuring that the quality of teaching and achievement in their areas is consistently good.

### The school has the following strengths

- The newly appointed headteacher demonstrates an ambitious vision for the school and the community which it serves. He communicates this effectively at all levels and has strong support from senior leaders, staff and governors. The school is therefore well placed to improve quickly.
- The Chair of Governors and the governing body are providing a good level of challenge to senior leaders.
- The school has been successful in closing the gap in achievement between pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding and their peers.
- The behaviour of pupils around the school and at break and lunchtime is good. Pupils are polite and courteous to each other and the adults they meet. They feel safe and say that bullying incidents are rare and always dealt with well by teachers.
- Parents have a very positive view of the school.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 34 lessons. Three of these were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors also looked at examples of pupils' work in lessons and considered the quality of marking and written feedback given to pupils.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers responsible for subject areas, two groups of pupils, the Chair of Governors and one other governor.
- The lead inspector also spoke with the school's independent self-evaluation partner who advises the school on its development and with a representative from the local authority.
- Thirty-two submissions to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were received. In addition, inspectors took account of the school's own survey of parents and carers. Returns from 33 questionnaires completed by staff were also considered.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's self-evaluation documentation, the school's own information on pupils' current progress, monitoring documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance, minutes of governing body meetings and documents relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Paul Williams, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Ian Bryant	Additional inspector
Christine Emerson	Additional inspector
Teresa Hill	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school is slightly smaller than most secondary schools.
- As part of the Building Schools for the Future national government initiative, the school moved into brand new premises on the school site in November 2012, the site being completed and officially opened in October 2013.
- A new headteacher took up his post in September 2013.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or supported at school action plus is below average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action is above average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in the care of the local authority and for children known to be eligible for free school meals, is above the national average.
- The school makes some use of early entry for GCSE examinations in mathematics.
- A small number of pupils are taught vocational courses at Bridgwater College and Cannington College.
- The school was previously designated as a specialist Science College.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum levels expected for pupils' attainment and progress for secondary schools.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is typically good by:
  - providing all pupils, particularly the least able, with the right level of challenge in lessons
  - supporting disabled pupils and those with special educational needs across the school more effectively
  - deploying teaching assistants so that they actively and consistently have a positive impact on pupils' learning
  - making sure that marking in all subjects consistently gives clear advice to pupils about how to improve their work and that this advice is systematically followed up by both pupils and teachers.
- Raise pupils' achievement and rates of progress by:
  - encouraging all pupils to take greater responsibility for improving their own learning
  - ensuring that all leaders responsible for subjects monitor and steer the quality of teaching effectively so that it deepens pupils' knowledge and understanding and always enables them to make at least good progress.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because the proportion of pupils who achieve five GCSE passes at A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, is too low. This proportion had been rising slowly in 2011 and 2012 but fell in 2013 and remains well below the national average.
- There is too much variation in the standards that pupils reach by the end of Year 11 in different subjects at GCSE and equivalent courses. For example, attainment in additional science is strong whereas results in art, drama and history were much lower.
- Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with consistently below-average attainment. The proportion of pupils making reasonable progress in mathematics is near to the national average, and is above average for pupils of middle ability. Fewer pupils make reasonable progress in English, particularly lower-ability pupils. Consequently these pupils have not made enough progress in this subject to make up for their previous low attainment.
- The school has been very successful in closing the gap in attainment between Year 11 pupils supported through the pupil premium and their peers. In 2012, this gap was equivalent to just under one-and-a-half grades at GCSE in English and just over one-and-a-half grades in mathematics. Unvalidated 2013 GCSE results indicate that these gaps have reduced considerably to one quarter of a grade in English and one half of a grade in mathematics.
- The progress of higher-ability pupils is in line with their peers nationally. In the best lessons the most able pupils are challenged to be creative and extend their skills. For example, in a Year 8 technology lesson, pupils were engaged in a 3D-design task involving kinetic sculpture which both caught their imagination and stretched their technical skills.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs made less progress than their peers. However, as a result of the good use of the Year 7 catch-up premium to fund focused literacy support, the low reading ages that many pupils have when they enter the school are now improving.
- The school rigorously checks how well pupils are doing. It is increasingly effective in using this information to recognise those pupils who are falling behind and to help them to catch up. As a result, the school's records of pupil attainment and progress, including externally verified information, show that pupils currently in Year 11 are now making faster progress than in previous years.
- Some pupils are entered early for GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 10. This group is carefully selected and if they achieve a grade C or better they are able to continue studying mathematics to try to gain a higher grade. Consequently this early-entry policy does not cause these pupils to be disadvantaged.
- The small number of pupils who are enrolled on 'College Link' courses at Bridgwater College and Cannington College are making good progress.
- The vast majority of pupils leaving the school continue in education, employment or training. This reflects the good quality of information and guidance they receive in school and the effective promotion of equality of opportunity.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because over time it has not been of a consistently high enough quality to help all pupils achieve well as they should and reach their potential.
- Since the last inspection the school has made significant improvements to the way it gathers information about the progress pupils are making. All staff are aware of the academic targets pupils are working towards. In the majority of cases these are used well to set work which is appropriately challenging. However, in some cases teachers do not make the best use of the

information they have about pupils' previous learning to plan lessons which challenge all groups.

- Where the teaching is at its best, a variety of innovative resources are used to engage and motivate pupils. For example, in a Year 11 science lesson, pupils were given short, interesting practical tasks to illustrate the thermal properties of plastics, each task deepening their knowledge further. However, some lessons are not as well planned and where the pace is slower, pupils' interest wanes and progress is reduced.
- Not all teachers give enough time to pupils to discuss their work, share their ideas and build their confidence. Consequently, lessons can be over controlled by the teacher, reducing the opportunity for pupils to take on responsibility for directing their own learning.
- There are many examples of detailed marking in books, with precise recommendations for pupils to follow in order to improve their work. However, there is wide variation in the quality of marking between teachers and between subjects. In some cases teachers' marking is not frequent enough and in others pupils are not given clear enough feedback.
- Senior leaders have taken steps to encourage teachers to learn from each other, for example through lunchtime meetings called 'learning lunches' where good ideas can be shared. Several examples of innovations being put into practice in classrooms were seen during the inspection, providing evidence that, overall, teaching is improving. A small team of highly effective teachers are used to support other teachers with the development of their skills.
- Teaching assistants are not always effectively deployed and do not always have a sufficient understanding of the specific learning and behavioural targets of the pupils with whom they are working or what they should do to support these pupils.
- The majority of teachers have good subject knowledge, promote good relationships and establish a positive climate for learning during lessons. There is a strong sense of moral purpose in the school which is demonstrated by the willingness of staff to devote time to helping pupils outside of their normal lessons.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils

### require improvement

- Behaviour in lessons is typically calm and polite. Where the teaching is good or better, pupils are generally quick to respond to staff and are cooperative with adults and with one another. Behaviour requires improvement and is not yet good because many pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop the necessary skills to take responsibility for their own learning, and are over reliant on adults for guidance.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs report that in some lessons pupils can lose concentration if they are not interested by the subject.
- Around school pupils behave well. They are polite, courteous and considerate towards each other. This is shown, for example, by the confident and helpful way that pupil receptionists speak to visitors.
- Pupils report that bullying is very rare and are confident that the school reacts quickly and effectively to any hints of victimisation. They are aware of various forms of bullying, such as homophobic bullying, and they are aware of the risks posed by the internet. As a result, pupils say that they feel safe at school.
- The vast majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) agreed that their children are well looked after and kept safe at school. The school's own evaluation of parents' views supports this opinion.
- Pupils travelling to College Link sessions, off the school site, are well supervised and kept safe in transit as the school provides its own transport.
- The flexible learning centre is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and behaviour. This is indicative of the caring and inclusive nature of the school. Pupils receive good support from dedicated staff who help with all aspects of their learning and personal needs. The number of fixed-term exclusions is below the national average.
- Attendance is broadly average; there are strong procedures in place to follow up on absence. Information is analysed well to help the school check on the attendance of different groups of pupils. Pupils are punctual to school and in lessons and they say they enjoy coming to school.

**The leadership and management** require improvement

- The headteacher demonstrates a strong determination to raise both the aspiration and the achievement of the pupils the school serves. Central to his vision is the inclusion of all pupils, regardless of their background. Nevertheless, leadership and management require improvement because not all pupils make the progress they are capable of.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have recently taken steps to improve the quality of teaching but these have not yet had time to impact fully on the achievement of all pupils. For example, senior leaders are now working more closely with teachers responsible for subjects to check how teaching is influencing the progress of pupils. However, there are still inconsistencies in subject areas, for instance the quality of teachers' marking varies widely across the school.
- Detailed and well-thought-through plans are in place to improve progress, particularly that of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. Improvements for this group of pupils have been considerably strengthened by a newly appointed leader but are at an early stage of development. For example, training for teaching assistants has been introduced along with more opportunities for the sharing of good ideas between them.
- The school has a good capacity to improve. The headteacher and senior leaders form an effective team. Senior leaders' judgement of teaching is sound; they base their improvement plans on accurate and well-managed records of pupils' progress. These records are beginning to be used more effectively by teachers responsible for subjects.
- New arrangements for managing the performance of teachers have been introduced by the headteacher, targets for improvement are clear and poor teaching is picked up early. There is a clear link between pupils' performance and salary progression.
- In keeping with the inclusive nature of the school, a wide range of subjects is taught, including several vocational courses. The school is utilising its new buildings effectively, for example through an indoor area recently set aside and fully equipped for teaching construction skills. There is an appropriate focus on addressing gaps in literacy skills in Year 7 and 8. Although some numeracy skills work is in place for Year 7, this work is not as well developed.
- Promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, the school ethos is optimistic and all pupils are valued. The warm welcome given to a pupil with a physical disability visiting from a special school demonstrated this well during the inspection.
- The school's arrangements for ensuring the safeguarding and safety of staff and pupils, both on and off site, meet statutory requirements.
- The local authority has given good support to the school over time, particularly through the recent major construction project and the appointment of a new headteacher.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governance of the school is good. Governors know the school well, take an active role in its life and understand its strengths and weaknesses.
  - The Chair of Governors has steered the governing body well during a period of uncertainty, while maintaining its strategic direction. He has used the recent changes as an opportunity to restructure the way the governing body works with the school so that individual governors have a better understanding of specific areas of the school.
  - Governors have recently received training on the use of information on pupils' progress and how it compares to that in schools nationally. This has further developed their understanding of the progress of pupils in different subjects and year groups. The governing body is aware of how targets are set for teachers and linked to pay increases. Records of meetings and other evidence indicate that the governing body is challenging and supporting the school leadership in its drive to improve the quality of teaching and raise standards. They monitor the impact of the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding on the progress of eligible pupils. The school budget is kept under regular review. Governors ensure safeguarding requirements are met.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	123878
<b>Local authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	426797

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	690
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Richard Cheetham
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rob Gammon
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	28–29 September 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01278 456243
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