

# The Robert Smyth Academy

Burnmill Road, Market Harborough, LE16 7JG

**Inspection dates** 11–12 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	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		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

- The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE A\* to C grades has not improved rapidly enough since the school became an academy.
- Students make no better than expected progress in English. Reading skills are supported well, but some students' ability to write effectively is underdeveloped.
- Not enough teaching is good or better. Weak teaching in a small number of lessons means that not all students learn as well as they should or make good progress.
- Some teachers do not mark students' work as regularly or as thoroughly as they should. As a result, students do not always know what or how to improve their work.
- Homework is not used effectively by all teachers to raise standards.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students make expected progress in GCE AS courses, but too much teaching requires improvement and the revised curriculum has not yet had a full impact on A2 Level results.
- The systems senior and subject leaders use to improve teaching and raise standards are starting to bring about improvements but have not yet resulted in good achievement for all groups of students, particularly those who are most able.
- Leaders' checks on how well school policies are applied in classrooms are not yet rigorous enough to promote consistently good teaching.
- The governing body does not have a clear enough view of the school's performance.

### The school has the following strengths

- Students make good progress in science and outstanding progress in mathematics. Standards in the performing arts are high.
- An extensive range of sporting, musical and cultural activities promotes students' personal development well.
- Students behave well. They contribute well to the warm, caring and respectful atmosphere and feel well supported by staff. They feel safe and say that bullying is rare. When lessons are interesting, students work hard and are keen to achieve their very best.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 46 lessons, of which 19 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, they made a number of shorter visits to lessons and tutorial sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher, leaders and managers, and groups of staff.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students, representing all age groups. Discussions also took place with students informally.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work and reviewed a range of documents, including the school’s own evaluation of how well it is doing, its improvement plan and statistical information about students’ achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- Inspectors considered the 66 responses to the online Parent View survey and 79 responses to the staff questionnaires. Additional comments were received from parents and carers, and consideration was given to the views expressed by parents and carers in response to the school’s own survey.

## Inspection team

Robert Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Neil Taylor	Additional Inspector
Alicia Welsh-Kuligowicz	Additional Inspector
Jane Gaffney	Additional Inspector
Beverley Mabey	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Robert Smyth School converted to become an academy in August 2011. When the predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted in 2010 it was judged to be good. It is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Almost all of the students are from White British, Irish or other White or Mixed White backgrounds and the vast majority speak English as their first language. A few students are from other minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is well below average. This is additional government funding to support particular groups of students, such as those known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is well below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- A small number of students spend part of their time studying at South Leicestershire College.
- The academy has gained a range of awards including Artsmark Gold, National Healthy Schools Status, Investors in People and the International Schools Award. It is affiliated to the National Space Centre and is a designated National Space Academy.
- Robert Smyth Academy is part of the Market Harborough Academies Partnership (MHAP). This includes the Welland Park Community College, with which the academy is considering a merger.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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

- Raise the quality of teaching and so raise achievement for all groups of students by:
  - ensuring that all lessons are engaging, challenging and motivating for all groups of students
  - planning to meet the literacy needs of students in all lessons
  - ensuring that teachers use questioning effectively to extend learning and check students' understanding
  - improving the quality of marking and oral and written feedback, so students know how well they are doing and what they have to do to make their work better
  - setting work at the right level of difficulty for each student, especially the most able
  - building on and fully embedding the developments that are already bringing improvements to teaching and achievement in the sixth form.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers and accelerate improvements by:
  - rigorously checking that school policies and new initiatives are put into practice, particularly those relating to teaching and marking
  - taking full account of the impact on students' progress when evaluating the quality of teaching
  - ensuring that all subject leaders have the skills they need to take an active and effective role in developing teaching within their specialist areas
  - ensuring that the governing body has a thorough understanding of the school's performance in order to fully challenge leaders at all levels.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students' progress varies across different subjects and in year groups, and they make no better than the progress expected nationally for their age. The improvements made this year have not been rapid enough to result in good achievement.
- In 2012 the Year 11 results were broadly average, but this reflected some underachievement given students' attainment on entry. For example, the more-able students underperformed at A\*/A grades in many subjects, and the English results were particularly disappointing.
- The 2013 results rose and the majority of students, including the most able, made expected progress. Almost two thirds of the students attained at least five C grades or above at GCSE, including in English and mathematics. Year 11 students made better progress in mathematics and science, and a previous decline in English had been halted; the 2013 results were in line with the 2012 national average and students had made expected progress.
- Students, including the more able, are now making the progress expected of them in English. They make good progress in science and outstanding progress in mathematics. Some students took mathematics examinations in the spring of Year 11 and some then repeated them in the summer. This practice had a very positive impact on success levels but will be discontinued in 2014 as the option of early entry is no longer available.
- The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs requires improvement. Improvements can be seen in mathematics and science, but issues remain within English, particularly in their writing skills.
- The small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those learning English as an additional language are making slower progress than other groups. The school is aware of this issue and is providing additional support, but it is too early to see the full impact. It is working towards achieving better equality of opportunity for all students, and does not tolerate discrimination of any kind.
- The school uses its pupil premium funding in a range of ways, for example through revision groups, visits to places of interest and careers advice. In 2012 the GCSE results of students who were eligible for free school meals were on average more than a grade behind those of their classmates in English and mathematics. Students are now making better progress this year, and the gaps in attainment have closed significantly in mathematics but less so in English. The school has looked at further ways to support these students but it is too early to see the impact of this work.
- A small number of students attend sessions within the local learning community and benefit from the opportunity to follow courses that appeal to their interests. They achieve well and gain valuable experiences and qualifications relevant to work. They are prepared well and helped to continue in education or secure work after leaving school.
- Over the last year more sixth-form students have attained grades above the national averages at AS level and results have risen because the academy has revised its curriculum to better meet the needs and abilities of students. It has also raised its entrance requirements for some subjects and this has had a positive impact on retention rates. These changes have not yet had an impact on achievement at A Level, which also varies too much between subjects.

- Additional staffing and support are helping less-able students to catch up in English and mathematics and settle into life at the school. Standards in literacy are rising because students are encouraged to read more often, by themselves and to each other, although they have few opportunities to read to adults.

### **The quality of teaching** requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it does not ensure that all students make good progress in all subjects. The school's information suggests that teaching is improving but it remains too variable in its quality, especially in the way that teachers use assessment information to plan their lessons and in the marking of students' class and homework.
- Where teaching is weak, planning often does not take full account of the needs of all the students. The students who have special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium are identified and catered for, but the needs of the more-able students are not always sufficiently planned for.
- On occasions, teachers do not challenge and motivate all students to produce their best work. Some work is not hard enough and students are not always expected to try hard. Some teachers do not pay enough attention to what students are learning in lessons and therefore do not adapt the teaching to match their needs. This affects the pace of learning and students' progress.
- Where teaching requires improvement, work does not sufficiently challenge students or enable them to practise their skills and the pace of learning slows. This is often because teachers spend too long explaining and do not allow students enough time to do their individual work or work with others. This results in some students losing concentration, because they are not actively involved in their own learning.
- Teaching in the majority of sixth form lessons observed required improvement. There was often a lack of challenge for students. Teachers did not use the information they had to tailor the learning precisely to the needs of their classes.
- Typically, teaching is good or better where it is well planned and clear learning objectives for students are identified. Activities engage the whole class and there is some group and paired work. Teachers ask questions to help guide learning; however, there are fewer opportunities for students to ask questions of each other. Work is marked regularly but there is only recent evidence that the actions asked of students are followed up.
- In the most effective lessons, the tasks and activities engage and motivate students, the pace of learning is rapid and students make good progress. For example, in a technology lesson in Year 13, there was a good balance of individual work and group work. Resources were used well to explain and reinforce learning, and the teacher asked probing questions to encourage students to develop their thinking skills. Students were able to explain clearly what they were learning and what they needed to do to improve their work.
- Teachers demonstrate a good knowledge of their subjects. They motivate students through the enthusiasm they show for their work. The most effective teachers have high expectations and create a positive climate for learning where students are keen to be successful and engage well with their learning.

- Positive relationships between students and staff mean that in most lessons students feel that teachers give them the help they need to succeed.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good.

- Students are well behaved and polite around the school. They respect each other and cooperate with all staff. When students are given the opportunity to work together and independently, they are keen to learn and have positive attitudes in lessons.
- The school manages behaviour well and staff are generally consistent in their use of the school behaviour policy. Even where teaching is less engaging or interesting, students occasionally lose their focus and become restless but generally respond well to teachers' reminders about their conduct.
- Parents and carers who responded to Parent View, and staff who completed the staff questionnaire, agree that the conduct of students in and around the school is good.
- Students are proud of their school community and speak positively about each other. Staff promote and model good behaviour. Students talk openly about how teachers respect them, and how they in turn respect each other and the adults within the school community.
- Students say that bullying is extremely rare. They are confident that staff will deal with any such incidents quickly and effectively. They feel safe and know about different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet. There have been no recorded incidents of racism or any other form of discrimination in the past two years.
- Attendance is improving and is now in line with the national average as a result of leaders' drive to reduce absence. Incidents of exclusions are falling and are now below average as a result of the work of the school's interventions team and house leaders.
- Students take on many responsibilities, including through the student council. Their involvement and engagement in charitable activities are strong. A good example is their success in raising funds to support the wider community, including the Dementia Café. There is also a thriving sports leadership programme and the school has been able to provide a rich and diverse range of extra-curricular activities in response to a strong 'student voice'.

### **The leadership and management** requires improvement

- The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body have a clear agenda for improving the quality of teaching further and raising achievement which is supported by most leaders and staff. The school improvement plan sets out its priorities and is used to drive through improvements. Recently developed systems for learning and teaching, and measuring the levels that students are working at, are starting to improve teaching and raise achievement, including in the sixth form. This work has not yet resulted in good achievement for all students over a sustained period of time.
- Although senior and subject leaders carry out checks on the quality of teaching and students' work, they are not frequent or rigorous enough to bring about rapid improvements in all subjects. Evaluations do not take full account of the impact of teaching on students' progress

and checks are not always rigorous enough to ensure that school policies, such as for homework or marking, are put into practice consistently.

- The school has appropriate systems for managing staff performance. Teachers have targets and review their progress against them. However, these are not based clearly enough on the link between teaching and students' progress to help raise standards further.
  - Staff training is focused well on the school's priorities and recognises individual needs. Newly qualified staff and teachers in training feel well supported.
  - The accuracy of assessments and checks on students' progress is improving. Students who are not making enough progress are identified and additional support is provided, but it is too soon to see the impact of these improvements on students' achievement.
  - There are many strengths in the range of subjects and courses offered to match the needs and aspirations of students in Key Stage 4. Improvements to the sixth form curriculum mean that it is better matched to students' needs and the positive impact can already be seen at AS Level. Personal, social and health education lessons support students' good personal development. A broad range of extra-curricular activities in sport, music, drama and many others are well attended. The school has good sporting and cultural links with the community.
  - Provision for students' spiritual, social and cultural development is good with some examples of outstanding practice. Assemblies provide good opportunities for students to reflect on a range of issues and some lessons, particularly in the arts, focus effectively on promoting cultural development.
  - **The governance of the school:**
    - Governors are ambitious for the school, monitor its work and ask some of the right questions to hold school leaders to account. They handle finances well, and manage the deficit budget very effectively. They make sure that safeguarding arrangements meet national requirements and that the school operates effective safer recruitment practices. The governors are aware of many, but not all, of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and have supported the headteacher in challenging underperformance. However, they do not have a clear enough view of the school's effectiveness, based on understanding its current performance. They are not sufficiently aware of the links between pay progression, performance management and the effectiveness of teaching as measured by students' progress, and do not know enough about the impact of pupil premium funding on the achievement of eligible students.
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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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137161
<b>Local authority</b>	Leicestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	425122

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy converter
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1291
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	441
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Max Corney
<b>Headteacher</b>	Colin Dean
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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