

Rainford High Technology College

Higher Lane, Rainford, St Helens, Merseyside, WA11 8NY

Inspection dates

27–28 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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

- Teaching is not good enough to ensure rapid progress for all students. Although it is improving, teaching is uneven across the school and within subjects.
- The gap between the achievement of students supported by the pupil premium and that of their classmates has widened rather than closed.
- Achievement in science requires improvement. Although now more stable, there has been much disruption to the quality of learning and this has resulted in students underachieving over time.
- The information available on students' progress and attainment is not always used to adapt the work so that it is not too easy or too hard for students.
- The way in which targets for improvement are set for students is over-complex and confusing. They are not used well enough to check on students' progress.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Teaching is improving but is yet to improve students' achievement across all subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- For the last few years, the overall attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11 have been significantly above national averages. The majority of students achieves well in most subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Students behave extremely well around the school and are very safe. They enjoy coming to school, as seen by their well above average attendance. They are friendly, well-mannered and polite towards each other and adults.
- Students believe that they now have a more influential voice in the life of the school through the much improved 'student voice'.
- The principal knows exactly what needs to be done to improve the school further. He has put the right systems in place, but it is taking longer to get all staff on board than he expected. Consequently, teaching and achievement still have some way to go.
- Governance is strong. Governors have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and hold leaders to account effectively.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their physical well-being are supported very effectively.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 53 lessons. Three observations were undertaken jointly with members of the school's senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons to look at students' work. They also visited tutorial sessions and a Year 9 assembly.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school, looked at a range of documentation, including the school's view of its own performance, safeguarding and child protection arrangements, behaviour and attendance, the quality of teaching and minutes of the governing body meetings. Students' work in books and files was also examined.
- Inspectors held a series of formal and informal discussions with students to discuss their experience of school, and particularly their learning, behaviour and safety. Discussions were also held with staff, including senior and middle leaders including those responsible for pupil premium students.
- A meeting was held with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. Inspectors also met with the Director of Children and Young People's Services and another representative from the local authority.
- Throughout the inspection, inspectors took account of 134 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), and of 39 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Anthony Briggs, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
John Dunne	Additional Inspector
Kath Harris	Additional Inspector
Mary Lanovy-Taylor	Additional Inspector
Darren Stewart	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Rainford High is larger than the average sized secondary school.
- Nearly all students are of White British heritage; very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well below that found nationally; so too is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A very small number of Key Stage 4 students receive part of their education off site at Everton Free School, Napier Street Inclusion Base and SALT Education Centre, Liverpool.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that there is more good and outstanding teaching across the school, particularly in science, and that all students make good or better progress, by:
 - making sure that there is a consistent approach that focuses on how well students make progress, rather than on what activities they will complete within a lesson
 - ensuring that all teachers have the same high expectations of all students
 - ensuring that work is pitched at the right level so that all students are challenged to do their best, especially in science.
- Accelerate the progress of the lower-ability students, the most able and those for whom the pupil premium is an entitlement, so that it is at least good through:
 - tracking more robustly just how well these students are making progress in every lesson
 - giving them work that ensures that they make at least good progress from their different starting points, especially in mathematics and science.
- Improve the target-setting procedures so that all staff use the information to pinpoint any potential underachievement as soon as possible, by:
 - simplifying the system that is used so that all staff, students and parents fully understand how targets are set in relation to the different starting points of students
 - ensuring that targets given to the most-able students are challenging enough
 - focusing more on the progress students are expected to make in all subjects and not just in English and in mathematics
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels are equally rigorous in making sure that teaching is consistently good or better within their departments.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was significantly above the national average in 2013, as it has been for the last three years. This positive picture of attainment has been the mainstay of the school's local reputation for several years.
- Nevertheless, some of the most-able students have not achieved the highest grades in English and mathematics and particularly so in science, Spanish and geography. Student attainment in science, although now showing signs of improvement, has been weak for some time.
- Even though the majority of students achieves well in English and in mathematics, progress is slower for lower ability and pupil premium students than it is for others in the school. Although the school takes care to ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted successfully, not enough attention has been paid to ensuring that all students make good progress with their learning in relation to their different starting points. Consequently, although pupil premium and free school meals students do better than their national counterparts, they do not attain as well as their classmates to the tune of nearly a whole GCSE level. Fewer of these students make expected and more than expected progress in English and mathematics compared to others in school.
- The achievement of the most-able students is not good because assessment information is not used well enough to push them on quickly in their learning. This was seen in a sample of science and mathematics books looked at by inspectors. Similarly, the lower-ability students also do not make good progress due to some work being much too hard for them. Those students with disabilities and/or special educational needs and the tiny number of students learning English as an additional language do well.
- Students build reasonably well on their GCSE success in the sixth form. However, not enough make the progress they should do in a range of subjects and consequently, achievement requires improvement.
- The school's projections for 2014 indicate that all the current Year 11 students are likely to make better progress and attain very well, irrespective of their starting points.
- Students enter the school at a level which is significantly above the national average. While some groups of students make good progress, such as middle-ability learners, the progress of other key groups, such as pupil premium students, lower-ability students and the highest-ability students is not rapid enough.
- Students' skills in reading, writing and speaking and listening are developed well throughout the school. As a result, most students are articulate both in writing and in their speaking.
- The small number of students educated off site achieve well.
- The school enters some students early for examinations and this has no negative impact on their education.
- Those students who are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up programme receive additional support to improve their literacy skills. The school's data show that the gap between them and others in their year group is being reduced.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although the quality of teaching is improving, there are still too many inconsistencies across the school and within subjects; this limits students' progress and results in almost a 'learning lottery' for students, depending on which teacher they get.
- Because the quality of teaching is inconsistent, some of the strengths seen were the very things missing when teaching was weaker. Teaching is most effective when very strong subject knowledge is passed on effectively and robust use of question-and-answer made students really think deeply about what they were learning and what the next step should be. In addition,

excellent relationships created an atmosphere that was comfortable to learn in and some really helpful marking enabled students to understand how well they were doing and what to improve.

- Where students make less progress, some work is much too difficult for the lower-ability students to grasp enough to make even a start. Occasionally, some of the brightest students in the class are chomping at the bit to get started, but lose interest because they continue to be provided with unnecessarily repetitive instructions.
- Some teachers have high expectations of their students and set a variety of challenging tasks which capture students' attention and make them think deeply. For example, in a Year 13 English lesson, students were challenged from the outset by probing questions to test the depth of their understanding. They were pushed even further through a series of sequential activities that extended their understanding of key terms and phrases associated with the way which children acquire language skills. Targets for students' progress are not set in a way that makes it easy for teachers to understand and used well enough to ensure all students make progress over time.
- Many aspects of teaching have improved across the school. New initiatives have been taken on board and this has resulted in better teaching. However, some teachers have struggled with some of the ideas or have been slow to respond. Consequently, although marking has improved across the school and students say that they now get much more of their work actually marked, it is not yet consistent. Similarly, the way the massive amount of assessment data available is used is variable. The best use results in students making more progress while some data indicate that little or no progress has actually taken place over a whole year.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is of a standard similar to that in the main school. Teachers have secure subject knowledge but do not ensure that all students make as much progress as they should in every subject, including English and mathematics.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

Are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Staff, parents and students are overwhelmingly positive about both behaviour and safety in the school. They say that behaviour has improved further, even though it was judged to be good at the last inspection. All staff that returned questionnaires agreed that behaviour is good and managed well. Inspection evidence showed that some students can misbehave if the teaching is less engaging.
- The students at Rainford High are delightful! They show genuine care towards each other and are naturally considerate and respectful. Students behave well with minimum adult supervision as they move around the large school site. A group of Year 7 boys explained how they 'loved the freedom' to be able to choose to stay indoors or outdoors.
- Students spoken with were keen to point out how more teachers take the time to: 'speak to us and be nice to us'. They say that supply teachers now take fewer lessons and that this has improved their learning and the behaviour of some students. They are appreciative of the extra effort some teachers put in for them. Nevertheless, some students, particularly girls, feel that the physical education staff still display 'favouritism' towards particular students to the disadvantage of others.
- Students concentrate very well in lessons and strive to do their best at all times. They demonstrate a genuine pride in their work and in their appearance. Those spoken to were united in their appreciation of their new building and facilities. This can be seen in the way that it is generally kept litter and graffiti free. Occasionally, a small number of students, mainly in Year 9, can misbehave if the quality of teaching does not keep them fully engaged. Nonetheless, students say that their learning is rarely disrupted by others 'messaging about' in class.
- The school has recently put a lot of effort into establishing systems that give students more opportunities to voice their opinions. This is highly valued by the students who believe that it is making a real difference in the way that their views are listened to. The school's promotion of its core value of 'everyone matters, everyone helps, everyone succeeds' is working well in creating a more unified community.

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Consequently, students feel safe in school. They have a good awareness of the different types of bullying and were keen to point out that there is: 'hardly any bullying at all now'. Detentions and exclusions are very low, with no permanent exclusions at all for the last 10 years.
- Students really enjoy coming to school. As a result, their attendance is well above the national average for all groups of students including sixth formers. The number of students who are persistently absent is much lower than that found nationally. Timekeeping is not an issue as students are punctual.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The principal is committed to improving the school. He understands very clearly the areas still requiring improvement and has put a raft of initiatives in place to resolve them. Middle leaders like the clear direction the school now has. However, this is no easy ride. There are several teachers within the school who are reluctant to change and even though more and more teachers are upping their game, some are resisting, occasionally hiding behind the belief that if it 'isn't broken, don't fix it'. Consequently, although leaders at all levels have tackled the points for improvement from the previous inspection with careful thought and skill, it is taking more time than the principal expected for the school to complete its journey to good.
- Some subject leaders are very good at what they do and believe that they are held to account for their actions. The leadership of English is particularly strong. However, some other subject leaders have yet to develop their leadership skills enough to improve achievement rapidly. There are inconsistencies in what teachers expect students to achieve. The way which middle leaders hold their staff to account is variable and in need of further tightening. There is too much confusion about the setting and use of targets for students' progress.
- The school knows itself well. Leaders, managers and governors have an accurate understanding of how well the school is performing and what it needs to improve. Improvement planning is focused on the most appropriate things in need of development. The upshot of these initiatives is that many outcomes have improved since the previous inspection.
- Systems to check the quality of teaching and the performance management of teachers have improved since the appointment of the new assistant principal. Slowly, but surely, the quality of teaching is improving as a result. Not enough sharing of the best practice that goes on in the school takes place. For example, the strengths that exist in English and textiles are not shared across the school in order to improve consistency.
- There has been a recent focus on improving the achievement of students supported by the pupil premium. Smaller classes, personalised tutoring, targeted pastoral support, and provision of additional equipment are some of the initiatives that have been introduced. Staff have a greater awareness of who pupil premium students are and the predictions for 2014 indicate that the performance gap could close significantly.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form, although requiring improvement, is getting better and slowly resulting in better teaching and students beginning to make better progress.
- The curriculum content is regularly checked in order to make sure that courses are suitable and successful and that students are being taught the correct things. There is a wide range of cultural and sporting activities offered to students. The school runs a number of outings such as ski trips and visits to Wembley and Old Trafford. These enhance students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.
- Nearly every parent that responded to the Ofsted Parent View, was very pleased with the school. This was echoed by the views of the school staff that returned questionnaires.
- The school has appropriate links with the local authority. It has received some effective support in relation to developing the 'student voice' as well as some other more generic support.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is sharp and well-informed. It supports and challenges senior leaders in equal measure. There is good educational expertise within the governing body which is used

effectively to keep the principal on his toes. Nevertheless, governors could improve their first-hand knowledge of progress and teaching to identify which teachers still need to up their game and drive the pace of improvement with even more rigour and urgency.

- Governor open mornings have moved the school forwards in several aspects of its work, in addition to giving the governors an insight of what goes on in their school.
- Governors are guardians of the financial integrity of the school and make judgements on whether or not a teacher should progress up the pay scale. They know how the pupil premium funding is spent to benefit these students and ensure that safeguarding procedures meet requirements.

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	104826
Local authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	431659

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1421
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Frank Gill
Principal	Ian Young
Date of previous school inspection	18 September 2012
Telephone number	01744 885914
Fax number	01744 884642
Email address	info@rainford.org.uk

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