

Diamond Academy

Hillary Road, Thetford, IP24 3DP

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2014

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		Requires improvement	3
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

- Teachers do not always set work that is sufficiently challenging for all groups of pupils, so they do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Some pupils do not listen carefully in lessons because teachers do not ask questions or set work that makes them think carefully.
- Teachers' marking is not always helpful in showing pupils how to improve their work, and teachers do not check to make sure that pupils respond to their comments.
- Pupils make slower progress in writing.
- Pupils do not take pride in the presentation of their work. Their handwriting is untidy and can be difficult to read.
- Teaching assistants are not always used well to support learning, so some pupils do not receive the support they need in lessons.
- Subject leaders do not use information about how well pupils are doing to plan improvements in their subjects.
- Homework is not set regularly in all classes.
- Pupils are often late for school.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal and Vice Principal form a very effective team. They use information about achievement to adapt teaching and help pupils make faster progress, especially in reading and mathematics.
- Teachers receive good training and support from the academy sponsor. Inadequate teaching has been eliminated.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and on the playground. They are polite to each other and to adults, and feel safe at the academy.
- Parents are supportive of the academy and say their children are happy to come every day. As a result, attendance has improved.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all classes. They saw 12 lessons, one of which was jointly observed with the Principal.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read in Year 3 and observed small groups reading in Years 3 and 4.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, Vice Principal, subject leaders, a group of pupils, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Academy Improvement Board and the regional director of the trust sponsoring the academy.
- There were not enough responses to the online Parent View survey to analyse. However, inspectors spoke to a number of parents before school on both days of the inspection to gather their views.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' books as well as their work and displays in all classrooms.
- A number of documents were examined, including the academy's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, improvement plans, records of meetings of the academy improvement board, safeguarding files, data on pupils' current progress and information on the management of teachers' performance and the monitoring of teaching.

Inspection team

Emily Simpson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Mason

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy opened in September 2012, sponsored by the Academy Transformation Trust. It is smaller than the average-sized junior school.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action, and at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, are above average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in local authority care, is very high.
- In 2013, the academy did not meet the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- Since its opening, the academy has had three changes of Principal. The current Principal took up his post in September 2013. The Vice Principal was seconded to the academy in October 2013 and took up the permanent post in March 2014.
- Half of the teaching staff are new since the opening of the academy.
- The academy sponsor disbanded the governing body in the autumn term 2012 and replaced it with an academy improvement board. New governors are currently receiving training and a new governing body will assume responsibilities in June 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so all pupils make faster progress by:
 - increasing the challenge in all lessons and making sure that pupils are always fully engaged in their learning
 - ensuring that teachers make full use of teaching assistants so all pupils receive the support they need
 - providing practical resources to support pupils' learning in mathematics
 - making sure that pupils are shown how to improve their work, and that they act on the advice they are given through teachers' marking.
- Improve achievement in writing by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to write at length in different subjects
 - ensuring that all pupils take care over their handwriting and the neat presentation of their work.
- Strengthen the impact of leadership and management by:
 - developing the roles of subject leaders in using pupil progress data to plan and monitor improvements in their subjects
 - working with pupils and parents to improve punctuality
 - promoting pupils' wider enjoyment of learning through further developing the new curriculum and linking it to regular homework activities.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Pupils join the academy in Year 3 with skills in reading, writing and mathematics that are below, and sometimes well below, national averages. Pupils' progress is improving in all year groups but it is not yet sufficiently fast in all classes for overall achievement to be good.
- When the academy opened, there was much inadequate teaching and pupils were underachieving. Results were low in 2013; attainment was one year behind national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. School data for pupils in the current Year 6 show they are making more progress than in the past, especially in reading. They are on track to meet the government floor standards at the end of this year.
- The Principal and Vice Principal have taken swift and effective action to tackle underachievement. Information about how well pupils are doing is frequently scrutinised to discover weaknesses in pupils' skills and understanding. Changes are then made to what and how pupils are taught so they can continue to catch up in their learning. School data, verified by the improved content of work in pupils' books, show that, since the autumn term 2013, pupils are attaining higher levels and making faster progress than previously.
- In lessons, some pupils do not make good progress because they do not listen carefully to their teachers and teachers do not ask questions to fully engage them in their learning.
- Pupils are making good progress in reading since the academy changed the way reading is taught in Years 3 and 4. This is helping pupils to close gaps in their understanding of phonics (the sounds letters make) and the meaning of what they read.
- There has not been sufficient focus on developing pupils' written skills, and progress in writing is slower than reading in all year groups. Pupils do not have opportunities to write at length and practise their written skills in different subjects.
- The results of the 2013 national tests showed pupils supported by the pupil premium attained similar standards to their classmates, and made similar progress. This is now the case in all year groups as funds are spent wisely; for example, to provide additional small-group teaching.
- Achievement in mathematics requires improvement because pupils are not always given practical resources to support them in developing their understanding of new concepts, and this slows their progress.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress in Years 3 and 4 because of the successful small-group teaching of reading.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- In many lessons, teachers do not ask questions to encourage pupils to think carefully. They readily accept the first answer that is offered. Where learning is more effective, teachers ask challenging questions and expect pupils to explain their ideas in careful detail.
- Teachers sometimes set work that is too easy for pupils. When this happens, pupils tend to lose

interest in their learning and do not make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers do not insist that pupils set out their work neatly.

- Teachers do not always make the best use of teaching assistants in lessons. This means some pupils who would benefit from additional help do not always receive it; for example, some of those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. Teaching assistants have received good training in the new way of teaching reading. This means reading can be taught in smaller ability groups.
- The academy's new marking policy is not used consistently in all classes. Teachers do not always show pupils how to make their work better; some comments in books are not useful in helping pupils to make progress in specific subjects. Teachers rarely make sure that pupils have responded to their marking by improving their work.
- Teachers have received training on how to assess pupils' work accurately. The Principal, Vice Principal and the academy sponsor check assessment data every six weeks. This information is used to plan lessons to help pupils move to the next level of attainment.
- Staff new to the academy have brought good skills which are being shared between teachers. In classes where learning is consistently effective, pupils are more excited, remain attentive throughout their lessons and make faster progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. While pupils' conduct is good, this positive approach is not consistently reflected in their attitudes to learning.
- In lessons, pupils are not consistently engaged in their learning. They chatter about things unrelated to work and do not always complete enough work in lessons. Teachers do not always insist that such chatter stops in lessons.
- Most pupils wear their academy uniform neatly. They do not present their written work well and often their books are scruffy. Handwriting is untidy in all classes.
- Parents and pupils agree behaviour has improved since the academy opened. New systems have been set up which focus on rewarding good behaviour. Staff and pupils like these systems. The positive impact is evident in the considerable drop in fixed-term exclusions; there have been few exclusions since the autumn term.
- Pupils are polite and friendly; they conduct themselves well as they move around the academy and play together.
- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Safeguarding records are up to date and academy staff work closely with parents and outside agencies to safeguard vulnerable pupils. Pupils know about different forms of bullying and trust all adults at the academy to help them, should there be a problem.
- The academy is rigorous in checking and following up absences. As a result, attendance has improved and has reached the national average. Punctuality requires improvement as a significant group of pupils do not arrive on time each morning, and this creates a disruptive start to each day's learning.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Decisive action taken by the Executive Principal in the academy's first year tackled and eliminated inadequate teaching. Since then, the new substantive Principal has worked with existing and new teachers to develop their skills, but not to a sufficiently consistent level for teaching to be good overall.
- The Principal and Vice Principal form a very effective team. They quickly secured the full confidence of pupils, staff, parents, the academy improvement board and the academy sponsors. With the support of these groups, they have led a number of initiatives that are securing better teaching and faster progress for pupils. This shows the academy has the capacity to improve further.
- Targets set for teachers are clearly linked to raising pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, and are reviewed regularly alongside pupils' work and assessments. Teachers are given additional training to help them meet their targets.
- Subject leaders receive good support from the academy sponsor and have frequent opportunities to work with teachers with similar responsibilities in other academies. They do not always use information about how well pupils are doing to plan and monitor further improvements in their subjects, relying instead on information provided by the Principal.
- The academy has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development. Senior leaders use this analysis, together with assessment data and lesson observations, to plan further improvements. The improvement plan is reviewed weekly and rewritten each term to maximise progress. This approach is speeding up progress in all year groups and enabling pupils to be increasingly more successful at school.
- The academy sponsor provides effective challenge and support to leaders. It checks the improvements led by the Principal and arranges additional support if progress slows in any area; for example, specialist support for special educational needs in Years 5 and 6 is just beginning as this group of pupils made slower progress in their most recent assessment.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is improving. Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong, and this is reflected in their improved conduct. They also enjoy more school trips to support their learning in class.
- The new funding for primary school sport has been spent on additional resources and training for teachers. Pupils have positive attitudes to physical education but have few opportunities to participate in competitive sport.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The academy improvement board is led by a strong Chair, and its members know the academy's strengths and areas for development. They meet every month and, because the Principal provides them with clear and accurate information, are able to challenge leaders to bring about further improvement. This information includes an accurate evaluation of the quality of teaching, which members of the board check through their own monitoring visits to the school.
 - The board knows how well teachers and different groups of pupils are doing. It checks that pupil premium funding is spent effectively on supporting eligible pupils.

- Policies are checked and reviewed regularly. The board has carefully revised the pay policy so that teachers' pay is tied to the progress of their pupils.

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	138419
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	425161

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	201
Appropriate authority	Academy improvement board
Chair	Joyce Hodgetts
Principal	Lee Francis
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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