

Aegir Community School

Gainsborough Educational Village, Sweyan Lane, Gainsborough, DN21 1PB

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make good progress, particularly in English and mathematics. Some students make rapid progress in their communication skills.
- The sixth form is good. Students are well prepared for transition to adulthood. Teaching is good and there is a successful focus on developing students' independent skills and sense of responsibility.
- Teaching is usually good and some is outstanding. Teachers have an excellent understanding of every student's needs, ability and interests and plan work well to meet these effectively.
- Students enjoy learning. They behave well in most situations. They feel safe and very well cared for.
- Leaders focus sharply on improving the quality of teaching. Training and support are effective.
- Governors are experienced and have a wide range of skills. They ask leaders demanding questions, as well as providing advice and support.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well through a wide range of activities and beyond the school, through links with schools internationally.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' progress is not rapid enough. This is because teachers do not always make clear what students will be expected to learn by the end of the lesson.
- Students are not always provided with effective support so that, occasionally, their progress slows.
- Leaders gather a wealth of information, but do not use this fully to plan and evaluate the effectiveness of their work, particularly the progress made by different groups of learners.
- Governors are not sufficiently aware of any link between teachers' performance and pay.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 13 part-lessons, most of which were undertaken jointly with the Executive Principal and the Head of School.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, students, representatives of the governing body, and a local authority adviser.
- The inspectors took account of 16 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 35 responses to the staff questionnaire received during the inspection, as well as the school's most recent survey of parents' views.
- Students' work in their books, and work displayed were examined, as well as a group of students observed reading individually to their teacher.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation including the school's information on students' progress, its self-evaluation, development plans and information relating to the safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection team

Mary Hinds, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Debra McCarthy

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Aegir School is federated with a primary special school, Warren Wood. There is an Executive Principal and one governing body for both Aegir and Warren Wood. Each school has a head of school.
- The Aegir School is located on the same site as Trent Valley Academy, a secondary school which is not run by the local authority.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs. The school educates students with complex and multiple needs, including moderate, severe profound and multiple learning difficulties. Approximately half of the students have autistic spectrum disorders.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for specific students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals) is well above average.
- Students come from a Gainsborough, Lincoln, Market Rasen and other surrounding areas.
- Almost all students are from a White British heritage. Boys outnumber girls by three to one.
- The school uses a range of work placements in local businesses and colleges including St. Bedes and Gainsborough College, as well as Hill Holt Wood which is an alternative provision to support students in full attendance. Students study GCSE at the co-located secondary, Trent Valley Academy.
- There have been several new appointments since the previous inspection, including three teachers. The Executive Principal and Head of School took up their posts in the autumn term 2013.
- The Executive Principal works to promote improvements beyond the school in partnership with the University of Northampton and the local Authority. This includes training special educational needs co-ordinators in gaining the National award across Lincolnshire.
- The federation supports a significant number of primary schools through 'outreach'.
- The school has achieved a number of awards for its provision, including the full International Schools Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding in order to secure rapid rates of progress for all students by:
 - making sure that students know exactly what they are expected to learn by the end of a lesson and that they understand how to achieve this
 - checking more regularly the progress students are making in lessons and using this information to adapt and re-shape activities, so that learning moves at a faster pace, especially for the most able students
 - supporting students in their learning, explaining each step, especially for those who find learning difficult.
- Strengthen leadership at all levels by:
 - identifying measurable targets in all improvement plans, based on the progress students make, including the progress made by different groups, so that the school's work can be precisely evaluated
 - making sure that governors have an effective system for checking whether there is a clear link between teachers' performance and their pay.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- All students make good progress academically from their different starting points, whatever their individual special educational needs or disabilities are.
- Students known to be eligible for the pupil premium funding make good progress. The additional funding is used well to provide targeted and timely support in the classroom, as well as specialist, individual support.
- Some of the students who have the most profound and multiple difficulties with learning move from having very limited communication to communicating reliably using symbols and technological aids to express their needs. They achieve well working with a specialist teacher and support staff on a one to one basis for a much of the school day. They experience specific therapies daily, for example in the hydro pool.
- Students with autism make good progress because visual timetables and objects of reference are used well by teachers to help students to understand the order of the day and when to start and finish activities.
- The school focuses well in making sure that students develop essential literacy and numeracy skills. In lessons, communication skills are an important feature in supporting the good rates of progress. Teachers encourage students to express their ideas and to read aloud in class, which results in rapid progress for some students.
- By the end of Year 11 and the sixth form, every student gains a range of national qualifications, appropriate to their needs and level of understanding, including functional skills in English and mathematics. More able students take GCSE's at the adjacent Academy. The school does not subscribe to an early-entry policy for GCSE examinations.
- Good sixth-form provision means students continue to develop effective literacy and numeracy skills. They make good progress by learning to apply these skills to work-related placements, college and apprenticeships. All students have the opportunity to undertake the Duke of Edinburgh Award, as well as experiencing a range of work-related placements, college, apprenticeships.
- Currently only a small minority of students attend alternative provision off-site on a part-time basis. These students achieve as well as their classmates.
- The school uses the Year 7 catch-up funding to ensure that any gaps are beginning to be closed. From their starting points these students also make good progress in English and mathematics.
- There are no real differences in the progress made by different groups of students, such as boys, or girls, whatever their learning difficulties. However, in some lessons, the most able students are not always given work which challenges them to think hard. Furthermore, those students who sometimes find learning difficult do not always have enough support. This slows their progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers and teaching assistants have an in-depth knowledge about individual students' needs, abilities and interests, gathered from precise observations and assessments. They plan activities to meet these individual abilities and which they know will motivate and engage students in their learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and often have a real passion for their subject, which is infectious. A good example of this was when students listened avidly to the impact of the Third Reich in a current affairs lesson. They were increasingly able to empathise and share their revulsion and shock about the genocide of vulnerable groups of society with adults and other students.
- Both teachers and teaching assistants are skilled in questioning students, in order to assess their understanding, to encourage students to express their ideas, and to prompt them to think more deeply about their work.
- Staff vary their feedback to students on how well they are doing. Spoken praise is used very effectively in lessons. Some students do not like written remarks in their books, and teachers provide guidance on post-it notes instead. Overall, students are provided with good feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work further.
- Students sometimes make rapid progress when they are given clear instructions on what they will be expected to learn by the end of the lesson. This fast pace of learning is maintained when teachers show students exactly what they need to do to achieve well. This precise identification of small steps in learning is not evident in most lessons.
- While progress overall is good, learning slows when students quickly finish their work, but are then given similar activities to complete, instead of harder work. This is particularly so for the most able students. Similarly, those students, including those in the sixth form, who sometimes find learning difficult, do not always have sufficient visual or practical prompts to guide and support their learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. They are usually eager and interested in their learning, especially when they are effectively supported. Students told inspectors that behaviour has improved since the arrival of the Executive Principal and the Head of School.
- Students have pride in their school. They move around very calmly and show respect for everyone, often opening doors for adults and each other.
- Attendance has improved and is now above average for this type of school, because students enjoy coming to school. The Head of School has worked closely with families and has secured their commitment in sending their child to school regularly.
- Staff successfully and consistently manage the behaviour of those students with challenging behaviour. The calm and supportive school culture helps to raise students' self-esteem and confidence.
- Students develop a strong sense of responsibility. They learn to become increasingly independent through outings, residential adventure trips and work experience. This stands them

in good stead for the future, particularly for those students in the sixth form. These students experience a range of activities to develop key life skills, including opportunities to go shopping on their own.

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students feel safe and they say that they like having key staff who they can talk to if they have any concerns. Students take their responsibilities seriously, as one school councillor told an inspector 'I am happy for anyone to talk to me and I will try my best to sort it out'.
- Students say that there is some bullying in school but they feel that adults deal with this promptly. They have a good awareness of different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.

The leadership and management are good

- The Executive Principal and Head of School are focused on ensuring that all students achieve what they are capable of and that they develop their independence. Following a period of instability, leaders have secured a 'can do culture', good student achievement, behaviour and teaching. The school is well placed to improve further.
- Leaders track individuals using accurate assessments to check whether students are making the progress they are capable of. Early interventions are put in place if their progress slows. This, together with work which is carefully planned to make sure activities build on what students know and can do, secures good achievement.
- Senior leaders, together with the governing body have tackled underperformance rigorously. School leaders ensure that the quality and impact of teachers work is directly linked to their pay, but they have yet to share this with governors.
- Senior and middle leaders are securing improvements in the quality of teaching. They make regular checks, and tailor training and support for individual staff.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well, developing students' sense of responsibility and what it means to be a good citizen, through the school council and enterprise projects. Students have an outstanding appreciation of cultural diversity through strong links with schools in Ghana, Pakistan and Beijing.
- The subjects taught are highly relevant and there are good links between subjects, with an extensive range of enrichment activities. The school recognises that the most able are not always suitably challenged and leaders are planning to extend the range of GCSE's taught in-house in the next academic year.
- Leaders at all levels, including the teacher in charge of the sixth form, have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. There are appropriate plans in place to improve further. However, these plans do not have measurable targets based on the progress different groups of learners make. As a result, leaders are not able to assess precisely the effectiveness of their work.
- The school works well with other professionals, both locally and across the local authority, providing support for many primary schools. It has strengthened the partnership with parents and carers through a wide range of activities, from the 'community cafe', to family learning activities. Most parents who expressed a view would recommend the school.

- Expertise is shared across the federation, including subject knowledge, behaviour management approaches and training and support to improve the quality of teaching across the federation.
- The local authority accurately regards the school as good and improving. It has provided effective support to the governing body for the appointment and induction of the new Executive Principal.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors bring a wide range of skills and experience to the governing body. Governors gather their own independent evidence through regular focused visits to the school, as well as supporting staff in the sixth form, for example. As a result, they have a good understanding of pupils' achievement and offer senior leaders the right balance of support and challenge to improve standards of achievement.
 - The governors have a sound understanding of how the pupil premium funding is used and know that this is having a positive impact on this groups' achievement, as they make the same good progress as all other students.
 - Safeguarding procedures and policies meet current requirements.
 - Governors have had some training for example for finance and curriculum as well as on student data, but do not have a good enough overview of how well different groups perform. Likewise, although governors know the school's strengths and areas for improvement, including the quality of teaching, they do not have an effective system for checking the performance of teachers and how this rewards good teaching.

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	135362
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	430715

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	127
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Page
Principal	Gary Nixon (Executive Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	8 May 2011
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