

# Houghton Regis Academy

Parkside Drive, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, LU5 5PX

**Inspection dates** 8–9 July 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	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		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Achievement requires improvement because all students do not make good progress across all year groups.
- The proportion of students making more than expected progress in English and mathematics is too low.
- Teaching in science, design technology, and humanities is not yet good enough to ensure that all students make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teaching does not always encourage students to think deeply about their learning or give them the skills to work things out for themselves.
- Some teachers have not acquired the specialist subject knowledge necessary to challenge higher ability students as they move up the school.
- Marking does not always help students to improve their work.

### The school has the following strengths

- Teaching and learning is improving rapidly because of purposeful leadership.
- Although progress is not good enough, achievement is strengthening quickly in English and mathematics.
- Students behave very well around the school, have positive attitudes towards their learning and feel safe.
- The support of the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust has contributed significantly to improvements at the academy and ensures that it has the capacity to continue to drive these forward.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors undertook observations of teaching quality in 33 lessons, some of which were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- A range of documents was analysed, including those relating to safeguarding, student progress, attendance, exclusions, the academy’s self-evaluation and development plan and its policies for managing teacher’s performance and improving teaching and learning.
- A wide range of students’ books, especially in English, mathematics and science was looked at closely.
- Discussions were held with the principal and executive principal, other senior and subject leaders, several groups of students and the chief executive of the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust.
- Inspectors received 27 completed questionnaires from staff and considered the results of the academy’s own parent survey. There were too few responses to the Parent View online survey to register. A letter from a parent was also considered.

## Inspection team

Lesley Daniel, Lead inspector

Seconded Inspector

Paul Lawrence

Seconded Inspector

Pete Sewell

Seconded Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Houghton Regis Academy opened in September 2012 under the sponsorship of the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust (GDFT). Its predecessor school, King's Houghton Middle School was inspected in July 2011 and judged to be satisfactory.
- Houghton Regis Academy is a smaller than average-sized middle school which is in transition to become an 11 to 18 secondary school. Currently, it has students from age 10 through to 13 and will begin teaching GCSE in September 2014.
- The academy has a high proportion of students who are eligible for the additional pupil premium funding. Pupil premium is provided by the government for some groups of students including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students who are supported through school action is above average. An average number of students have statements of educational needs or are supported at school action plus.
- The academy meets the government's floor standards that define minimum requirements for attainment and progress.

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

- Increase the proportion of good teaching to raise overall achievement by:
  - extending to all subjects the good practice that is successfully strengthening achievement in English and mathematics
  - providing training for teachers, especially those who are not subject specialists, to improve their subject knowledge
  - making sure that all teachers provide challenge for students of all abilities by planning work that is at the right level of difficulty for them to achieve well
  - ensuring that teachers use questions in lessons which encourage students to think carefully about their work and develop their ability to speak fluently and confidently
  - improving the quality of marking so that all students have a clear understanding of how to develop their work and are able to demonstrate to their teachers that they have understood and acted on the advice given.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- The proportion of students making expected progress at Key Stage 2 in reading and writing is close to national figures and is improving. The proportion of students making more than expected progress is still below the national average.
- In mathematics, the proportion of students making expected progress at the end of Key Stage 2 remains below national expectations. The proportion making more than expected progress is also below national expectations but is increasing.
- Higher ability students are not making enough progress because the work that they are given is not challenging enough.
- The principal has taken decisive action to improve the performance of Year 6 and much of the most effective learning seen by inspectors was in Key Stage 2. Progress for all groups of students in this year group, especially in reading and writing, is improving.
- Data supplied by the academy, supported by detailed scrutiny of students' work, showed that in many subject areas there is an improving picture of achievement between the ends of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. This is certainly true in English, mathematics, art, drama and Spanish. However, the progress students make in science, humanities, design technology and information technology is too slow and requires improvement.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make similar progress to other students in the academy, as do those students who are supported by additional pupil premium funding. There is very little difference between the attainment of pupils entitled to free school meals and others in the school in reading, writing and mathematics. This small gap at the end of Key Stage 3 for some students eligible for pupil premium is closing rapidly especially in reading and mathematics. In lower years this gap has already been closed in reading.
- Pupil premium funding has been used to support this in a number of ways. Initiatives which have had most impact include one to one support, booster sessions for groups of students and the use of the Accelerated Reader programme.
- The academy has introduced new approaches to improving writing across the school. Students could talk about how they use the vocabulary, connectives, openers and punctuation drive known as VCOP to help improve the quality of their writing. The impact of this was seen in particular in the content of Year 6 writing. Students' books showed that the accuracy of their written work is not improving as quickly as the content because teachers are not correcting mistakes.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because the impact it has on progress varies between year groups and subjects. In Key Stage 3 it is not improving at the same rate as it is in Key Stage 2.
- There are still some subjects where students feel their lessons could be more interesting. In some lessons, students are not given activities that require them to think for themselves or help

them to develop deeper understanding in the subject. Tasks are sometimes too difficult or too easy and do not keep students interested. In one Year 8 religious education lesson, students were asked to watch a film clip explaining the concept of the Trinity which contained vocabulary and examples not understood by the students and not explained by the teacher.

- Not all teachers use questioning effectively to check understanding or challenge students to think about their learning.
- Teachers provide too few opportunities for students to write on their own, other than in English. In some subjects, such as history, expectations of students writing are not high enough and consequently the more-able students produce work that is not good enough. In other areas students are not encouraged to develop their written work beyond a few simple sentences.
- Marking is not good enough. Not all teachers provide clear enough advice for students about how to further improve their work. Teachers do not always make sure that students follow up this advice by applying it and showing their teachers that they have understood. Teachers are not consistently highlighting errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar and so students are not learning to correct them.
- The subject knowledge of some teachers is not good enough and this limits the impact of their teaching. In history, there is a lack of subject specific feedback in students' books and in science the use of key subject words is inconsistent. The level of work provided does not always stretch higher ability students, especially in Years 8 and 9.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are well supported by teachers who are more confident at adapting work to meet their specific needs. Inspectors saw teaching assistants working effectively with lower ability students in the classroom, breaking tasks up to make them more accessible and encouraging students to talk about what they were doing to check they understood.
- The most effective learning was seen when students were given the right level of challenge for their ability and the opportunity to apply what they already know to new situations so that they work out problems for themselves. Students were enthused in these lessons and engaged positively with each other and with their teachers. In one Year 6 mathematics lesson, activities challenged students to explore the concept of probability. In Year 6 English, lower ability students worked together well to find the most original descriptive words and then put them into a correct sentence.
- Students told inspectors that they feel in many subjects, such as English, mathematics, drama, art and Spanish, they are learning better because behaviour in lessons has improved and what they are doing is more stimulating. They felt that teachers could be more consistent in the way they use the academy's rewards and sanctions systems.

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

- The behaviour of students is good. Students told inspectors that changes to behaviour policies have had an impact because students are now clearer about where the boundaries are that will result in sanctions. Inspectors saw the 'Purple Points' reward system used successfully to reinforce positive behaviour in lessons.
- In every year group, but in Year 6 in particular, students were enthusiastic about their learning

and demonstrated positive attitudes and relationships with adults in the class. They responded promptly to teachers' instructions and low level disruption was uncommon.

- Students move calmly around the school between lessons and at break times they are friendly towards each other. They are polite, punctual to lessons and care about looking smart in their uniform. They keep their school environment free from litter.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students understand the different types of bullying and told inspectors that they would feel confident that if they reported an incident to a member of staff it would be dealt with. There have also been recent assemblies on how to keep safe on the internet and 'giving racism the red card'.
- The academy promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students well through lessons on topics such as 'What is Britishness?' and by celebrating national events such as Black History month. Displays around the school promote the Purple Parliament - the academy's version of student voice - which students enjoy being part of. They also take responsibilities they are given seriously, such as being break monitors.
- The number of students excluded from school because of poor behaviour is falling rapidly. The academy uses a variety of approaches to keep students in lessons and learning. Some students have contact with mentors first thing in the morning to help to prepare them for the school day. Parents are involved as much as possible through regular home contact.
- Attendance is improving and is in line with other middle schools nationally. The academy actively promotes the benefits of good attendance with displays of current figures and competitions between tutor groups.

## **The leadership and management** are good

- The academy principal and the executive principal from the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust have provided clear and effective leadership that has raised the aspirations of both staff and students. The academy is on a clear path to becoming a good school demonstrated by the improvements in the behaviour and attitude to learning of students and the rising standards in teaching and learning and, as a consequence, in the progress and achievement of students. Staff surveys during the inspection support overwhelmingly the changes brought in since the academy opened.
- The school is improving rapidly, although unevenly. Core subjects such as English and mathematics have improved quickly but science and humanities are lagging behind. Changes and new appointments in place for September, however, show that these weaknesses are being addressed.
- The academy has clear arrangements to review the performance of teachers, to tackle under-performance and to reward those who teach effectively. There are plenty of training opportunities available to help teachers improve and develop their teaching. The academy is working closely with other academies in the GDFT to ensure that the transition from middle school teaching to secondary teaching is successful.
- The role of subject leaders is still developing as the academy prepares to begin GCSE teaching in September. Because of the current size of the school there are some single teacher departments

at present and so the academy is also drawing on the experience of other GDFT academies to help develop the management skills of these middle leaders.

- Teachers regularly record how well students are doing. However, progress information provided by the academy during the inspection was variable in quality. Detailed scrutiny of students' work did not always support the data. The levels awarded by some teachers relied at times on the evidence of one piece of good work rather than a solid bank of evidence.
- The progress of disabled students, those with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium is well monitored and extra guidance and support put in place where needed.
- The subjects offered at the academy suit the needs of the students and the support of the GDFT has enabled the academy to offer a wider range of GCSE choices to Year 9 than would normally be possible in such a small school.
- Sports Premium funding has been used to improve the training of staff and to buy new sports equipment as well as to give students opportunities to participate in more activities after school. Students have also been able to join with other GDFT academies in competitive sporting activities. The impact of this has been to involve more students in sport, helping to develop healthy lifestyles and improve the physical well-being of the students.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust provides effective governance for the academy. It holds the principal and executive principal to account for the quality of teaching, rewarding good teachers and challenging underperformance. The Trust is also fully aware of the academy's performance compared to other schools nationally through regular reviews. Many of the structures that have led to improvements at the academy, for example in behaviour, are tried and tested methods brought in by the Trust. It also provides expertise in finance and teacher's performance management and ensures that all safeguarding requirements are fully 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>	138569
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	440063

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>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	305
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jackie Simpson
<b>Principal</b>	Martin Bonner
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	N/A
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 863294
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