

Isambard Community School

Redhouse Way, Redhouse, Swindon, SN25 2ND

Inspection dates 26–27 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students' achievement requires improvement because students have not made as much progress, especially in mathematics, as they should have done.
- Teachers do not make sufficient use of homework to enable students to consolidate and extend their learning, and to accelerate their progress.
- Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what students can achieve. As a result, they do not consistently give students work that stretches them enough so that they can make as much progress as possible.
- Teachers do not give students detailed and regular advice about how to improve the quality of their work. Teachers do not provide students with enough opportunities to act on their advice.
- Students' behaviour requires improvement because, when activities fail to engage or maintain their interest, students can become distracted or distract others from their work.
- Teachers are not all consistent in their application of the school's rules for behaviour in class.
- Measures introduced by school leaders to improve the quality of teaching have not yet been fully implemented across the school. In addition, these initiatives have not had time to make their full impact on raising students' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have accurately identified the school's weaknesses. They have acted swiftly to improve the quality of teaching. The quality of current students' work shows that achievement is improving significantly as a result of this.
- The school has used additional government funding well to narrow gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged and other students.
- Students feel safe in school and have few concerns about bullying. Most parents agree that the school looks after their children well and keeps them safe.
- Leaders have revised the curriculum so that it gives students greater opportunities to fulfil their academic potential.
- Students benefit from a wide range of after-school activities and special events. This makes a strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Members of the governing body know the school well. They are ambitious for the school and set leaders challenging targets which are contributing to its improvement. Governors have helped to ensure that the school is able to benefit fully from the external support which it has received.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 37 part lessons, taught by the same number of teachers. Five of these lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also made shorter visits to a number of other lessons and activities. They attended an assembly and a number of tutor group meetings, and examined samples of students' written work together with a senior leader.
- Inspectors held discussions with groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other members, as well as with staff. The lead inspector met representatives from the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including the school's information on students' attainment and progress, and records of attendance. They examined safeguarding procedures and records of the school's own lesson observations, as well as self-evaluation, performance management and planning documents.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, inspectors took account of 177 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. They also considered four messages from parents, and 30 questionnaires completed by members of the teaching and support staff.

Inspection team

Robin Gaff, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Christopher Allen	Additional Inspector
Julie Miriam	Additional Inspector
Janet Simms	Additional Inspector
Jenny Usher	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the averaged-sized secondary school.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds.
- About one in five students is eligible for the pupil premium. This is additional government funding provided for disadvantaged children who are looked after or known to be eligible for free school meals. This proportion is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, about one in five students, is above average.
- The proportion of students who are learning English as an additional language is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- A small number of students in Key Stage 4, which varies from year to year, attend full- or part-time courses provided by five other organisations. These are Haddon Training, the Oakfield Campus, the Riverside Centre, the Swindon Hospital and Home Education Service, and Swindon College.
- The school is currently being led by an acting headteacher, following the retirement of the previous headteacher in August 2014.
- The school is currently receiving support from Faringdon Community College in Oxfordshire, whose headteacher is a national leader of education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all students make consistently good progress from their starting points, by ensuring that teachers:
 - make better use of homework to enable students to build on what they have already learned, and extend their knowledge and understanding
 - give students detailed feedback on their work, so that they know how to improve and are given enough opportunities to act on teachers' advice
 - provide students with tasks which challenge them so that they achieve as well as they should.
- Ensure that teachers always insist on the highest standards of behaviour in lessons.
- Make sure that leaders at all levels ensure that all staff consistently implement measures to improve the quality of teaching and students' behaviour.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Senior staff and the governing body have correctly identified the most urgent priorities for action needed to improve the school's performance. They are ambitious for the school and have succeeded in making their high expectations clear to staff and in sharing their drive for improvement with them.
- The acting headteacher and her senior colleagues have already had a significant impact on improving teaching and raising achievement. In particular, they have removed potential obstacles to students achieving as well as they could, by ensuring that they are no longer entered too early for GCSE.
- Leaders have also improved the ways in which the school assesses students' attainment and measures their progress. This has enabled staff to use the resulting information in planning more suitable work for different groups of students. As a result, students are now making more rapid progress and their achievement is improving substantially.
- Leaders have also introduced new systems for encouraging students to behave well and to deter bad behaviour. Students and staff report that this is already resulting in improvements in students' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Leaders set demanding, but realistic, targets for staff, and have insisted on pay rises being explicitly linked to progress towards them, and to raising students' achievement. They rigorously check the quality of teaching throughout the school by observing lessons and examining samples of students' work. They have also acted promptly to improve teaching by substantially reducing the amount of weak teaching.
- Leaders enable staff to share examples of good practice, and to benefit from specific training and coaching when teaching is not good. Staff new to the teaching profession or to the school speak highly of the support and encouragement they have received from leaders at all levels.
- Subject leaders and other members of staff who have whole-school responsibilities are knowledgeable about their roles and enthusiastic in fulfilling them. They are playing an increasingly effective part in improving the areas for which they are responsible.
- The local authority has worked closely with school leaders to accelerate the process of improvement. It has enabled the school to benefit substantially from support from another school outside its own area and from the expertise of an external consultant. This has improved the accuracy of the school's evaluation of its own performance. It has also enabled staff at all levels to receive practical advice which has resulted in them improving specific aspects of their work.
- Leaders have ensured that the school makes good use of the extra government funding it receives for disadvantaged students. Additional teaching and support, for example, have resulted in improved attendance as well as better learning and progress for these students. This has enabled gaps between their attainment and that of other students to narrow considerably. It also demonstrates the school's successful commitment to promoting equality of opportunity.
- The school provides students with a curriculum which is broad and balanced, and which corresponds to the needs of different groups. These include disabled students and those who have special educational needs, as well as the most and the least able. Students have good opportunities to take part in a variety of sporting, musical and other cultural activities, as well as special events such as visits to universities and exhibitions. This, together with the school's programme of personal, social and health education, makes a strong contribution to the promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Students from different backgrounds relate well to one another and have a good understanding of the range of different traditions and cultures represented in modern Britain.
- The school's involvement of students in the development of its new behaviour policy is an example of its promotion of British values, including the role of democracy. Inspectors found no evidence of any discrimination.
- The school ensures that all students benefit from effective, impartial careers advice. This helps them to make well-informed decisions about their choice of further education and training courses.
- School leaders rigorously check the attendance, safety and behaviour of those students who attend courses at other institutions, as well as their attainment and progress. They work closely with staff there to ensure that the students behave well, are safe, attend regularly and achieve their potential.
- Leadership and management are not outstanding because the improvements leaders have introduced have not yet resulted in all areas of the school's work being at least good. They have not yet ensured that all staff fully implement the measures which have been developed to improve teaching and students' behaviour.

■ The governance of the school:

- Members of the governing body have been closely involved in determining priorities for the school. They helped its leaders to address them by, for example, closely monitoring the impact of the external support being provided. Governors are determined to ensure that the school improves still further and set leaders demanding, but realistic, targets in order to make sure this happens. They have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the school's performance compared with that of other schools. Governors know how well students are achieving, and are very much aware of the quality of teaching. Through the reports they receive from middle as well as senior leaders and regular visits to the school, governors know what leaders are doing to improve teaching. Governors also know what is being done to tackle any weak practice. They understand and support the links leaders have established between pay rises and teachers fulfilling their responsibility to help to raise students' achievement. Governors have a secure understanding of government requirements for safeguarding students, and ensure that they are fully met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement.
- In lessons, students lose focus and some distract others from their work when tasks are not stimulating or challenging enough.
- Teachers do not always enforce consistently the school's expectations with regard to students' behaviour. For example, they fail to stop students calling out answers or talking when they should be listening.
- For the most part, students behave sensibly and considerately when moving around the building, and during break and lunch times. They arrive punctually at lessons. Most students take pride in what they do, so that work in exercise books is usually well presented.
- The school has succeeded in improving the behaviour of those students who have seriously failed to live up to its expectations. As a result, the number of exclusions has declined sharply.
- Students confirm that behaviour has improved as a result of the introduction of the new system of rewards and punishments.
- The school makes sure those of its students who attend courses at other institutions are safe, attend regularly, and behave well there.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students of all ages say they feel safe in school, and a large majority of parents agree that this is the case.
- Students are very well aware of different types of bullying, including cyber and prejudice-related bullying. They say that although bullying does occur, it is rare, and that any occurrences are dealt with promptly and effectively by staff.
- Students know how to keep themselves and others safe, for example when using the internet.
- Students' attendance is above the national average. The school has been successful in reducing the numbers of students who find attending school difficult.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not enabled students, over time, to achieve well.
- Teachers are not yet consistently using the information they receive about students' abilities to set work at the right level. On occasion, work is too easy for some students. This limits the amount of progress which students can make.
- Students report that they are not given regular homework by all teachers in all subjects and year groups. Some students told inspectors that they would like to have more homework. A significant minority of parents do not believe that their children receive appropriate homework for their age. Leaders recognise that this is preventing students from covering as much ground as they could and from building on what they have learned in class.
- The quality of teachers' marking is too variable. Teachers do not always provide students with sufficiently detailed comments about what they have done well, or advice about how they can improve their work. Students are not given enough opportunities by teachers to respond in depth to their comments. This

limits teachers' ability to check that any misconceptions have been corrected and any gaps in learning filled.

- Senior leaders correctly judge that the quality of teaching and use of assessment across the school are improving. Inspectors saw some examples of excellent marking by teachers and observed lessons in which students were making good or better progress.
- For example, in an English lesson, students were highly engaged in a debate on the text they were studying. The teacher's skilful use of questioning enabled the students to improve their understanding of the topic, and to develop their speaking and listening skills.
- The school has good systems in place to encourage students to read widely, and to help those students who find reading difficult to catch up with their peers.
- Improved teaching in a number of subjects, such as science and mathematics, where achievement has been weak, is enabling students to make faster progress. This is resulting in students having a firmer grasp, for example, of mathematical principles and processes, so that they are able to solve problems, more easily.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the school with levels of attainment that are expected for their age. They reach average standards by the time they leave, as shown by their performance in GCSE examinations, indicating reasonable progress from their starting points.
- Between 2012 and 2013, the proportion of students who gained five or more good passes at GCSE, including in English and mathematics, fell. The proportion gaining a C grade or higher in mathematics, and in a number of other subjects, was significantly below average. The provisional results for 2014 show that the decline has continued, albeit at a slower rate.
- Both sets of results were greatly affected by the school's policy of entering almost all students early for GCSE in a range of subjects, including mathematics. This limited students' ability to fulfil their academic potential, especially the most able students.
- Weak teaching over time has also had a negative impact on students' progress. This means that students have not been as well prepared as they should have been for the next stage of their education and future employment.
- Because of changes to the early entry policy, together with the swift and effective action taken by leaders to improve teaching, students' attainment is now rising. As a result, their progress is accelerating, including in mathematics. This is evident from the quality of work in students' books, as well as from their responses in lessons.
- Improvements in teaching are reflected in the progress made by the most able students. Teachers are now making better use of the information they receive about their prior attainment to tailor work to their needs. As a result, the highest-attaining students are now reaching standards that indicate that a higher proportion of students are reaching their potential.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make at least as good, and often better, progress than their peers. This is because the school works well with outside professionals to identify these students' needs. Teachers and teaching assistants then make sure that the students receive the extra support they need. This is also the case for the small number of students who are learning English as an additional language.
- In 2013, there was a significant gap between the performance of disadvantaged students and that of other students in the school. This was equivalent to almost a whole grade in English and to one grade in mathematics. Compared with all students nationally, their attainment was just over half a grade lower in English and more than one grade lower in mathematics. However, disadvantaged students' results in 2013 indicated that these gaps had narrowed compared with the previous year, by almost half a grade in each subject. The gaps between their progress and that of other students had also narrowed in mathematics, although not in English. However, the 2014 provisional results and the school's reliable information about current students' performance indicate that gaps in progress in both subjects are now closing.
- Students who follow off-site courses, provided by other organisations, achieve at least as well as other students who are educated solely by the school. This is because school leaders make sure that these students follow courses which correspond well to their needs and interests, and that they attend regularly.

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	131196
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	454610

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Gray
Acting headteacher	Sue Banks
Date of previous school inspection	9–10 November 2011
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