

Ormiston Denes Academy

Yarmouth Road, Lowestoft, NR32 4AH

Inspection dates 4–5 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
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

- Though teaching is improving, leaders have not yet secured good or better teaching across the academy. Hence, students' learning and progress are uneven and they do not yet achieve as well as they could.
- Not all teachers use assessment information well to provide work that challenges all ability groups. Hence, at times, work is too easy for some or too hard for others, and some students lose focus and behave inappropriately.
- Sometimes teachers do not ask questions well enough to test students' understanding or make sure they are fully involved in learning.
- Marking and written feedback do not always provide students with clear and precise feedback on how to improve their work. This is particularly the case in mathematics.
- Leaders have not ensured that strategies to improve students' literacy skills are firmly established across different subjects.
- The most able students are not always fully challenged and stretched.
- Some students are not making the big gains in learning needed from their low starting points to help them to catch up.
- The leaders responsible for disabled students and those who have special educational needs do not organise and check the data on their progress well enough to identify where extra help is needed.
- The poor attendance of a few students has a negative impact on their progress. Fixed-term exclusions, though reducing, are above average.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal has high expectations and provides strong leadership for improvement. He has very effectively established a clear sense of common aims and goals to which all staff now work.
- The academy is improving in all areas of its work. Leaders at all levels are having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and, consequently, achievement is rising, especially for disadvantaged students.
- Good systems and clear policies are now well established, particularly to support the work of teachers.
- A wide range of well-developed training is available for staff. This is tailored very effectively to help individuals to strengthen teaching and leadership.
- Students are safe at the academy, and say so themselves. Their growing self-confidence is promoting positive attitudes in lessons.
- The behaviour of students is much improved. This is evident in the rapidly declining exclusions and the generally positive attitudes around the academy.
- Governors hold leaders to account and help to improve teaching and raise standards. They and the academy are well supported by the Ormiston Academy Trust.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team carried out 26 lesson observations, many of which were conducted jointly with members of the leadership team. The inspectors also made a number of shorter visits to lessons in order to check the quality of support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and provision for students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Principal, members of the senior leadership team, governors, subject leaders, other staff and a representative from the Ormiston Academy Trust.
- They spoke informally to students in lessons and around the academy, as well as holding more formal discussions with representative groups of students from Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, the inspection team took account of the 57 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) and 66 questionnaire returns completed by staff.
- The team observed the work of the academy. They looked at the academy’s self-evaluation summary and its improvement plan, a range of policies and procedures, documents relating to the work of the governing body, and the arrangements for ensuring that students are safeguarded. They also looked at data relating to students’ attainment and progress, and records of behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Gulshanbir Kayembe, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Brian Hawkins	Additional Inspector
Paul Meredith	Additional Inspector
Piers Ranger	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ormiston Denes Academy converted to become an academy school in June 2013, and is part of the Ormiston Academy Trust. When its predecessor school, Denes High School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be inadequate overall.
- The academy is similar in size to the average secondary school.
- Most of the students are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language.
- Just under a quarter of students are disabled or have special educational needs which is above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students for whom the academy receives the pupil premium is well above the national average at just under a half. The pupil premium is additional government funding for students in care and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Alternative part-time education in construction in nearby Gorleston is currently provided for a very small number of students in Year 11.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- Since its conversion, the academy has made some significant changes in staffing, especially at middle and senior leadership levels.
- At the time of this inspection, two members of the senior leadership team were absent.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by making sure that:
 - all teachers make good use of assessment information to set challenging work for all abilities so that students remain focused and interested in their work
 - staff ask questions effectively to help students gain deeper understanding and develop their ability to explain their ideas, and encourage students to participate fully in lessons
 - written feedback in marking provides sharp and precise guidance to students on what they need to do to improve their work, especially in mathematics
 - teachers routinely expect students to respond to these comments.
- Raise levels of achievement by:
 - providing students with more opportunities to practise writing in subjects across the curriculum
 - raising levels of attendance further and reducing persistent absence.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership by making sure that:
 - the leaders responsible for disabled students and those who have special educational needs identify precisely where extra support is needed, and provide it promptly
 - all teachers provide regular opportunities to develop students' literacy skills, including oracy.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management are not yet good because leaders have not yet had sufficient impact to enable teaching, learning and achievement to be consistently good. For example, they have not secured effective development of students' literacy skills or quality of marking, especially in mathematics, across the academy, and there are weaknesses in the leadership and management of special educational needs.
- The academy's leaders have worked hard to create a positive climate for learning within which teaching and good behaviour can start to flourish. This has been done by addressing significant behaviour issues and establishing systems for behaviour management that are working effectively.
- High expectations, which come straight from the top, are setting high standards for teaching and learning. These expectations are backed up by good-quality training and support via coaching and mentoring based on accurate evaluations of teaching over time. In addition, a very rigorous approach to recruitment and selection is ensuring that the academy is hiring the best staff, including the best leaders, that it possibly can. Consequently, teaching and leadership are improving, academic standards are rising and the academy has the capacity for continued improvement.
- Middle leaders, such as heads of department and subject leaders, are developing their roles well. They have a clear understanding of what makes good teaching and, therefore, their evaluations of the work in their subjects are accurate. Though teaching is not yet consistently good, subject leaders are making a difference to the day-to-day work of their departments. This is because they are managed and supported well by senior leaders.
- The pupil premium funding is used well. As a result, it makes a big difference to the progress and attainment of disadvantaged students. In the current Year 11, the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and others has closed. In other year groups, the gap is narrowing at a good rate.
- A firm focus on equality of opportunity means that the academy keeps a close eye on the attainment and progress of different groups of students. It usually acts quickly when individuals are found to be underachieving and is working to raise the achievement levels of all. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated and actively tackled.
- An exception to the successful promotion of equal opportunity lies in the leadership of provision for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The progress data showing how well these students are doing are not well recorded or analysed. This failing limits the extent to which the leaders are able to identify and tackle differences in ongoing progress of different groups and categories of students who have special educational needs.
- Leaders are developing the curriculum so it is more closely tailored to the abilities and interests of all groups of students. The subject courses are supplemented by a wide range of enrichment activities, such as trips and visits, visitors to the academy and after-school clubs. Students have opportunities to participate in performances and were busy rehearsing for their forthcoming musical during the inspection. These activities contribute effectively to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Given students' low level of attainment on entry to the academy, the development of literacy skills is a high priority. Consequently, literacy is promoted in different subjects as well as in specific work such as reading with a partner in tutor time. Students have many helpful opportunities for writing longer pieces of work and extending their vocabulary, but these and opportunities to develop students' oracy skills are irregular. Consequently, students are not building their literacy skills systematically across the curriculum.
- Most students are being reasonably well prepared for life in modern Britain. Weaker provision for some groups of students, such as understanding of cultural and religious diversity, is being actively addressed. Students are taught to understand fairness and their rights and responsibilities as future adult citizens.

This helps to promote their personal development effectively.

- Students receive effective advice on careers and guidance for the future. The vast majority move on to relevant and appropriate educational courses or training.
- A small number of students attend off-site education in construction. Leaders rigorously monitor their attendance, behaviour and progress. Consequently, they achieve well.
- Safeguarding is given due attention, and the arrangements are effective and meet national requirements. Consequently, students feel safe and the atmosphere is positive around the academy.
- The academy trust provides both effective support and robust monitoring of the progress made by the academy. It responds promptly when requests for support are made and is actively engaged with staff and governors. Consequently, it is having a positive impact on improving the academy.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Rigorous scrutiny of governance by the academy trust, and support to develop it, have ensured that governors are well equipped to hold the academy to account. They have a good understanding of its work, in terms of both academic standards and the quality of teaching. Governors are appropriately involved in the management of teachers' performance, and checking how well their targets have been met. They examine data on students' progress carefully and ask searching questions based on their analysis. For example, they probed in depth the GCSE examination results for 2014 to find out why they were so low. Governors are included on the Ormiston Academy Trust progress board, set up to keep a close eye on current progress towards better GCSE results. This scrutiny enables them to ensure that standards are, indeed, rising. Feedback from external reviews gives governors an independent view of how well the academy is progressing, and is supplemented by their own regular visits to the academy. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding and special educational needs, for example, makes robust checks on these areas. Governors are shrewd in their decisions about pay rises, rewarding good teaching while challenging any that needs to be better.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. This is because attendance and exclusion figures, though improving, do not yet compare favourably with national norms. In addition, the work on enabling all students to develop good learning habits, such as having the right equipment, is still in progress. Nonetheless, behaviour around the academy and in lessons has improved measurably over the last 18 months.
- While a small minority of staff and parents responding to the Ofsted questionnaires feel that behaviour is not good enough, other evidence indicates that disruptions to lessons, as a result of poor behaviour, are now infrequent. Very little inappropriate behaviour was seen. Where students were not fully focused on learning, it generally related to the quality of teaching and staff expectations not being high enough.
- Fixed-term and permanent exclusions are higher than national norms due to the enforcement of a strict behaviour code. However, exclusions are now in sharp decline as students conform to the more demanding requirements for good behaviour.
- The academy is generally a calm and orderly place. At lunchtimes students sit and chat together or work in the library. They get on with one another, including with those who are from backgrounds very different to their own.
- Both absence and persistent absence are higher than average, and the academy's analysis of GCSE results indicates that students who were regularly absent did badly. However, the gaps are closing and attendance levels are rising. Punctuality is also improving and most students come to school on time.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students are well looked after and cared for. They have confidence in their teachers to help them if they have a problem or difficulty.
- Students report that occasional bullying is dealt with swiftly and resolved by staff, making them feel safe. Bullying, including name-calling, based on prejudiced or discriminatory attitudes is strongly discouraged and rarely occurs.
- Students are taught how to keep themselves safe in school, out of school and in the local community. They are also taught how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. Training on e-safety meets requirements.
- The academy works hard, and in conjunction with a wide range of agencies and students' families, to ensure that students are safe outside school as well as inside. Checks are rigorously undertaken on all adults working in the school to ensure that all are safe to work with students. Staff are well briefed about safeguarding matters and those leading the area are well trained.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Better teaching is having a positive impact on students' learning and achievement, including their literacy and numeracy. However, teaching is not yet consistently good across the academy, so students' learning experiences remain too variable and they do not yet make good overall progress.
- The academy collects a significant amount of assessment data but this information is not used well enough by teachers to make work challenging for all abilities. Consequently, some students find the work relatively easy and finish quickly, and others find it too hard to do on their own. In these instances, students' learning and progress are slowed down as a result.
- Teachers ask students questions routinely but not always to good effect. Where learning is most effective, teachers extend students' thinking with questions to test understanding and choose carefully who they ask. However, at times, questioning is superficial or requires only brief answers, and students are not pushed to explain their thinking.
- Teachers' planning identifies clear objectives so that students know what they are learning and why. They are aware of how learning in a current lesson is connected to learning in previous lessons. Prompt starts to lessons help to get learning moving forward well.
- Teachers make good use of teaching assistants to support specific students in lessons. This helps to ensure that these students are engaged and involved in the lesson, and that they have the support they need to complete the work provided.
- A strength of the teaching is the good relationships that teachers establish with their students. As a result, students respond positively to teachers' requests. Positive relationships also help teachers to manage behaviour well in most cases.
- Most books are regularly marked with written feedback about improvement. However, the feedback is not always specific enough to help students understand what they need to do to make their work better. Nor do teachers ensure that students routinely respond to the feedback. In mathematics, written feedback is often limited with too much of the work being marked by students themselves.
- Regular opportunities for reading, especially for weaker readers, are helping to improve students' abilities to understand a wider variety of texts and written information. Students are also gaining a wider vocabulary as a result.

The achievement of pupils**requires improvement**

- Students begin at the academy with attainment that is significantly lower than is typical nationally. Though attainment on entry for year groups lower down the academy is getting better, it remains below average. Far more students begin with low levels of prior attainment than those with high levels of prior attainment. Weaknesses in literacy hold back academic progress for many.
- GCSE results in 2014 were low and too few students left with five GCSE grades of A* to C including English and mathematics. Not enough students made expected progress in English and mathematics. Despite this, some groups performed well. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, did well when compared to similar groups nationally. Students with a statement of special educational needs made good progress. In addition, students with good attendance achieved well.
- Observations of lessons and examination of students' books indicate that students currently in the school are making better progress than those who took GCSE examinations last year. Consequently, they are improving their standards of attainment. However, variations in the quality and quantity of work produced by students means that progress and achievement, though improving, are not consistently good.
- Current Year 11 students are on track to achieve much better results, and for the academy to meet floor standards. Students are making at least the progress expected nationally, and many are exceeding this rate. The academy is predicting performance in 2015 to be at least in line with students nationally. Some Year 11 students are currently achieving well.
- In other year groups, a similar picture of accelerated progress is helping many students who are behind to catch up to where they should be. However, there are some variations across year groups and subjects. This means that, while gaps in performance with students nationally are narrowing, they are not closing, or on track to close, altogether.
- In GCSE examinations in 2014, disadvantaged students attained over a grade lower than others at the academy in English and almost two grades lower than other students nationally. The gap was wider in mathematics, at over two grades lower than other students nationally and about one and a half grades lower than others at the academy. Disadvantaged students did not make enough progress in English or mathematics. However, this result has been turned around quite significantly. Disadvantaged students in the current Year 11 are on track to attain as highly as others. Gaps in other year groups are narrowing well.
- Data show that the most able students are broadly making the progress expected of them. Books and observations show that they are productive in lessons and, when challenged well, make good progress. However, they are not always extended enough to reach high standards of work on a consistent basis. For example, at times they complete the work set but are not then given additional work quickly enough. When taught in mixed-ability groups, the most able are given the same work as others, which they find relatively easy.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with other students in most cases; those with a statement of special educational needs make good progress. The support all these students receive in lessons helps them to move forward in their learning. However, the failings in monitoring and analysis of the assessment data within the special educational needs area mean that key information to help sharpen provision and tailor support more effectively is being missed.
- The very small number of students on alternative study are doing well on their construction course.
- The academy enters some students early for GCSE examinations but without detriment to their overall results. This is because leaders have thought through very carefully how they use early entry.

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	139403
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	449856

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	940
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Juliet Winstanley
Principal	Peter Marshall
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
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