

# The Robert Smyth Academy

Burnmill Road, Market Harborough, LE16 7JG

**Inspection dates** 10–11 March 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
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
Sixth form provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Disadvantaged students have not made enough progress over time across all subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- Students have not made good progress in English in the last two academic years.
- Until recently, the most-able students, disabled students or those who have special educational needs have not made good enough progress.
- The quality of the written feedback that teachers give students varies too much. Some teachers give too little emphasis in their marking to improving students' literacy skills.
- There is too little support for students' numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics.
- Teachers do not regularly ask students thought-provoking and challenging questions in order to improve their progress.
- Key Stage 4 students' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive.
- Senior leaders have an over-optimistic view of the quality of teaching in the academy and have not identified all of those teachers whose practice requires improvement.
- The systems to support teachers' performance management are not coherent or effective.
- Leaders have not ensured that teachers know how to use student progress data effectively to improve both their teaching and its impact.
- Senior leaders, including governors, have not evaluated the impact of pupil premium funding closely enough.

### The school has the following strengths

- The Principal and vice-principal, both appointed at the start of this academic year, have accurately identified areas for improvement relating to student achievement and are addressing them effectively. Consequently, all groups of students are now making better progress.
- Leaders are ensuring that academy data, particularly that relating to students' achievement, is more accurate than it has been in previous years.
- Students generally make very good progress in mathematics, music and most science subjects.
- The sixth form is good and students achieve well in this phase of the academy.
- Students feel safe, are polite to each other and to adults, take pride in their appearance and conduct themselves well around the site.
- Many members of staff make valuable contributions to the academy's excellent extra-curricular programme, particularly in performing arts and sport.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students learning in 44 lessons taught by 42 different teachers. Sixteen of these lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, and five members of the governing body. The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors spoke with students in meetings as well as informally in lessons.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the academy’s evaluation of its own performance, the academy improvement plan, data on students’ attainment and progress, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding procedures, evaluations on the quality of teaching and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors took into account 118 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 51 responses to the staff questionnaire. The lead inspector also took into account two pieces of correspondence from parents.

## Inspection team

Ian McNeilly, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Nigel Griffiths

Additional Inspector

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop

Additional Inspector

William Cassell

Additional Inspector

Patrick Walsh

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Robert Smyth Academy is larger than the average secondary school for students aged 14-19.
- The proportion of students who receive pupil premium funding is much lower than the national average. This additional government funding is for children looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is lower than average.
- The proportion of students who are White British is well above average.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision arranged by the following providers in Leicester: Trans4m; Gaz Autos; and MOKO hairdressing. Alternative provision is also used through The Learning South Leicestershire Partnership; Saddington Stables in Foxton; and XLR8 in Market Harborough.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The Principal and vice-principal took up their roles in September 2014. The Principal is a long-standing member of the academy staff and was previously a senior leader. The vice-principal is new to the academy.

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

- Improve teaching and thereby the achievement of all groups of students by:
  - ensuring that the written feedback teachers give students places more emphasis on improving students' literacy, and helps them make better progress, especially in the case of disadvantaged and disabled students and those who have special educational needs
  - providing more challenge to students through teachers asking thought-provoking questions, particularly in the case of the most-able students
  - sustaining the recent improvement in the teaching of English by ensuring that teaching continues to directly address the requirements of the examination specification
  - providing more support for students' numeracy skills in subjects outside mathematics.
- Improve behaviour by:
  - encouraging students to have consistently positive attitudes towards their learning, particularly in Key Stage 4.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - making the systems for managing teachers' performance coherent and robust
  - ensuring leaders, including governors, evaluate the impact of pupil premium funding more closely
  - ensuring that teachers use all available data to improve their teaching and better meet the needs of students.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management requires improvement

- Over time, senior leaders and governors have not secured good rates of progress across subject areas for all students or ensured that students have consistently good attitudes to their learning. The relatively new Principal and vice-principal are fully aware that the academy requires improvement and they have correctly identified most of the necessary areas for development.
- Disadvantaged students have not been well served by the academy. In 2014, their achievement and attendance was poor and they were excluded too often. Their underachievement in 2014 was not foreseen. Academy data for the achievement and attendance of this group of students show that they are both improving rapidly but it is too soon to say how well these improvements will be sustained.
- In the past, the leadership of the academy has not ensured that all students, including the most able, have made good progress over time in English. While there is clearly some very good practice in this department, it is, and has been, inconsistent.
- The systems that senior leaders use to support teachers' performance management are not coherent or robust. Senior leaders have taken action to improve the quality of teaching but could not readily demonstrate, when asked, the evidence to support their view that it was improving fast enough.
- Leaders' judgements of teaching quality are too optimistic and do not take sufficient account of the impact of teaching on achievement. Their records show that students' progress in nine out of ten lesson observations is at least good, and the overwhelming majority of the academy's teachers are judged to be at least good overall. Student outcomes do not support this view.
- Senior leaders, including governors, do not evaluate the impact of pupil premium funding effectively. The academy's website statement on this funding lists what the money has been spent on but the analysis of its impact is missing. Part of this extra money is used to fund the post of the pupil premium co-ordinator. This member of staff is highly valued by both colleagues and students and she is beginning to have a positive effect on the work of the students in her care. However, the detail of the impact of her work is not clearly evaluated, nor is the impact of other pupil premium spending.
- Although senior leaders make every effort to ensure students are not discriminated against, they do not do enough to ensure all groups of students enjoy equality of opportunity. The leader with responsibility for disabled students and those who have special education needs is very caring towards her students and the academy site has been appropriately modified to meet their needs. Until recently, however, the support for this group of students has not been as effective in ensuring their academic needs are identified and addressed early enough. Nonetheless, students with more complex needs told inspectors that they can access all areas of the curriculum. Students spoken to felt they were encouraged to make a positive contribution to school life and to the community beyond the academy. One teacher said of the students, 'They are not so much tolerant of others – they are supportive'.
- Soon after taking up his appointment, the new vice-principal identified that teaching was not focused enough on securing better examination outcomes. He has led improvements in this area. Academy data on students' progress shows that their achievement is now improving.
- Leaders have ensured that there is an increasing amount of data available on the progress that students make, and they have also taken steps to ensure it is more accurate than in previous years. The senior leader with responsibility for data management is proficient in its use. The same cannot be said for all teachers, some of whom feel overwhelmed by it.
- Middle leaders are becoming increasingly effective in checking on the progress students make, and in providing challenge and support to their colleagues. Middle leaders are motivated to take on new challenges, and the professional development opportunities the academy provides are helping teachers to improve their practice.
- The quality of the curriculum is generally good and offers students an appropriately broad and balanced

education. The academy has a link with the National Space Centre and interested students can pursue a GCSE in astronomy. Sixth form students have the opportunity to study music technology.

- The curriculum and, in particular, the academy's excellent extra-curricular provision, make good contributions towards students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and prepares them well for life in modern Britain. The academy's performing arts and sports programmes are well-regarded by students, parents, staff and the local community. The academy has several systems in place that encourage first-hand understanding of the principles of democracy, such as the house system and the councils established to oversee the sport and performing arts activities. However, there is too little support for students' numeracy outside mathematics.
- Academy leaders and members of staff have created a positive culture around safety in the academy. Arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements. Appropriate systems are in place to refer cases to the local authority if this should become necessary. Members of staff show a lot of care to the students. There is a discrete mentoring programme for students. Year 10 and 11 students benefit from having a specific member of staff identified as their key point of contact, and they receive good support where this is necessary and appropriate.
- Senior leaders monitor the progress of the small number of students who attend alternative provision effectively. They check the behaviour and attendance of these students through direct liaison with named individuals at all the organisations these students attend and carry out safeguarding checks to ensure they are safe. Members of academy staff conduct visits to oversee the effectiveness of each placement. Monitoring records indicate that the alternative providers are having a positive impact on the progress of the students.
- Careers advice and guidance are effective. Teachers from the academy visit local schools to inform Year 9 students about their options at Key Stage 4. Students spoken to by inspectors valued this advice. Key Stage 4 students felt well-informed about the options open to them in the sixth form. There is a programme of work experience for Year 10 students, and they are well prepared for this through discrete lessons. The academy also uses an independent careers adviser to provide additional guidance where this is needed.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governance, while requiring improvement, has improved since the last inspection. Governors are committed to having more impact on the life chances of the students in their care. As a result of the changes made by senior leaders, they now have an accurate view of the academy's performance in terms of students' achievement and the quality of teaching. Governors interviewed agreed that the academy needs to improve and they accurately identified where improvement was most necessary. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding has regular meetings with appropriate members of staff in order to keep up to date. Governors are well informed about the academy's finances. They are involved in pay progression discussions and in the appraisal of the Principal. Governors are aware that they need to be more informed about the impact of pupil premium funding and about the performance management of teachers. They are also aware that all members of the governing body need to provide as good a level of challenge to leaders in their own areas of responsibility as that provided by the link governor to the sixth form.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Students' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive and do not always have a good impact on the progress they make. Students too easily become disengaged from their learning and go off-task, particularly where teaching is weak. These weaknesses in students' attitudes exist across all year groups and several subjects. They are far less prevalent in academic courses in the sixth form, where behaviour is good.
- Several groups of students were interviewed during the inspection. Students in all groups expressed the view that behaviour occasionally affects their progress.
- A small minority of staff and parents also expressed the view that behaviour was not as good as it should

be. None, however, suggested that behaviour was a major cause of concern.

- Inspectors also observed lessons where students' attitudes to learning were excellent. For example, the most-able students were highly engaged and motivated in Year 11 English and history lessons due to the enthusiasm and subject knowledge of the teachers.
- Students relate well to each other during tutor time. One student said the school 'is like a big family'.
- Students behave well when moving round the site, though punctuality is occasionally an issue. Students take pride in their appearance and are generally friendly and polite. The academy site is largely litter and graffiti free. Despite the tight space available in the canteen, students are patient and behave well.
- Scrutiny of the academy's records and discussions with students reflect that bullying is uncommon and that staff deal with it appropriately as soon as it is noted.
- The behaviour of students attending alternative provision is good, and they are supported well by the close communication that exists between the academy and the providers.
- While the attendance of students is in line with national averages overall, disadvantaged students did not attend regularly enough in 2014. Academy data shows that their attendance is now improving.
- Exclusions were too high in 2014, particularly for disadvantaged and disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Academy data shows that exclusions rates are improving, particularly for disadvantaged students.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- The academy has established a culture where students' safety is given a high priority. Students are aware of strategies to keep themselves safe, including when using the Internet. This has been brought about through the curriculum as well as the assembly programme.
- Most students were well aware of which adults they could turn to in times of need.
- The site is wholly secure and routines for checking in visitors, which included taking a digital image, are well established.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- The quality of teaching in the academy requires improvement because it has not ensured that students make good progress across all subjects. There is too much variation in teaching quality across the academy.
- The quality of the written feedback teachers give to students varies too much. There is insufficient focus on marking to improve students' literacy skills. Teachers do not always give students the clear guidance they need to improve their work and thereby their progress. Some examples of detailed and formative marking were evident, however, in English homework booklets.
- Too many teachers do not use questioning effectively. This is particularly an issue concerning the most-able students who are not provided with consistent, thought-provoking questions to develop their reasoning and help them make increased rates of progress.
- While achievement in GCSE mathematics is generally very good, there is no consistent approach to developing students' numeracy skills in different subjects, nor an academy-wide numeracy policy. Work to support literacy across the curriculum is more developed, though there is little evidence in many teachers'

marking of good support for this aspect of students' achievement.

- There is both good and outstanding teaching in the academy, including examples of best practice in teaching which, in other respects, requires improvement. For example, in a mathematics lesson the teacher regularly stopped a lesson on histograms to challenge the students to think about how they could improve their performance. Detailed and formative marking was seen in some English homework booklets.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is generally very good. They could respond in detail to students' queries.
- Teachers are very committed to their students. Many give up their own time to offer extra support either on an individual or group basis. There has been a recent increase in the amount of support available for those students identified as being the most-able and who should achieve the highest grades. This extra commitment shown has contributed to improved progress being made this year by the most-able students in English.
- Teachers set homework regularly. Students, including those in the sixth form, feel they receive an appropriate amount and that it contributes towards them making progress. The majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire agree with them.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Students underachieved in English in 2013 and 2014. This resulted in fewer students, just 59%, achieving 5 A\*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics than was expected. This is above the national average for attainment but does not reflect good progress, as these students were an able group whose prior attainment on entry to the academy had been above average. Teaching in all subjects, but particularly in English, is now more closely related to examination outcomes. As a result, academy data shows improvements in progress in this subject.
- The achievement of disadvantaged students in 2014 was unacceptably low and showed a decline from that seen in 2013. Only 16% achieved 5 GCSEs at A\*-C including English and mathematics. This is not only well below their non-disadvantaged peers nationally and in the academy but is well behind the achievement of disadvantaged students nationally. Most of this disadvantaged group were of average ability.
- Disadvantaged students who completed Year 11 in 2014 were almost two GCSE grades behind their peers in the academy in English and slightly more than two grades behind their peers nationally. The achievement gap between these students and their peers was even worse in mathematics, a subject in which most students achieve well in the academy. Disadvantaged students were two and a half GCSE grades behind their peers in the academy and two grades behind their peers nationally.
- However, academy data shows that the progress of this group has improved considerably this academic year in English and mathematics. This group of students is also making good progress in biology, chemistry, physics, additional science, and food technology. They are not making enough progress in art, business studies, or history.
- The most-able students have not performed consistently well over time. In 2014, the achievement of these students was below expectations in English, art and food technology. However, they achieved well in mathematics, chemistry, physics, and media. Improving the achievement of the most-able students has become a focus for the academy. Current data show that the most-able students are now achieving better standards in most subject areas, including in those in which they underachieved in 2014.
- In 2013 and 2014, disabled students and those who have special educational needs did not make good progress overall. While there have been some advances this academic year, they are not catching up to expectations as quickly as other groups of students and this area of the academy's performance still requires significant improvement.
- When taken as a whole year group, students perform much better than their peers nationally in

mathematics, music and most science subjects. Achievement is very good overall in these areas.

- Early entry for GCSE is not used often and, when it is, it does not have a negative impact on students' progress.
- Academy data show that the progress made by students in alternative provision is good, taking into account the range of activities they pursue in these settings.

### **The sixth form provision is good**

- Senior leaders, including the assistant principal with responsibility for the sixth form, have ensured that this aspect of the academy's provision is good.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good overall. The progress made by students who completed academic courses in 2014 was better than that seen nationally.
- Very good progress was made in several subject areas, including mathematics, business studies and economics, music and music technology. Students underperformed in French, Spanish and food technology.
- Disadvantaged students, disabled students and those with special educational needs in the sixth form make similar progress to their peers.
- Teaching is good. Teachers' thorough subject knowledge allows them to communicate complex concepts clearly, and to respond effectively to students' uncertainties. Tasks are designed precisely to support progress.
- Students spoke very highly of the quality of academic support they receive. Together with teaching staff, the leader of the sixth form monitors their progress closely and offers appropriate support in the light of any underachievement. Teachers have also shown great commitment in supporting students who are completing courses outside of the normal curriculum time, for example in film studies.
- Students interviewed were unanimous in their praise of the sixth form centre manager who they believe has a very positive impact on the day-to-day running of the provision.
- Behaviour and safety in the sixth form are good. In some lessons observed, the students' positive attitudes to learning made an outstanding contribution to the progress they made.
- Study programmes are appropriately challenging. Students who do not achieve entry requirements in English and mathematics are offered a one-year course consisting of re-sits and other opportunities to progress academically. This meets the needs of these students and allows them to progress to more academic courses in the sixth form, should they wish to do so.
- Students benefit from a thorough programme of guidance when choosing their next steps, including detailed advice on completing UCAS applications. The proportion of those students who left the academy's sixth form in 2014, and are not in education, employment or training, is very low.
- Most students participate in a range of activities which allow them to take roles of responsibility and to develop skills which prepare them for education, employment and life beyond school. Students value opportunities for charity fund-raising, participation in music, dance and sport, as well as residential trips, visits to universities, and enterprise fairs.



## 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>	137161
<b>Local authority</b>	Leicestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	453613

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 converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	14–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1271
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	400
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Max Corney
<b>Principal</b>	Sue Jones
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	11 September 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01858 440770
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<b>Email address</b>	office@rsacademy.co.uk

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