

REACH School

9 High Street, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B14 7BB

Inspection dates 28–29 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	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

- Not all students are making the good progress in reading, writing and mathematics that is needed for them to make up for past underachievement.
- Students have too few opportunities to read widely or for pleasure.
- Attendance, although rising, is still too low. The attendance of a few students is poor. This limits their progress.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that all students receive the 25 hours of teaching to which they are entitled each week.
- The weekly timetable is not well organised. Some students do not have the chance to attend an assembly. Not all students are given the time to catch up on work they have missed while they are out at other providers.
- Teachers do not always follow agreed ways of working, for example when they mark students' books.
- Some teachers' knowledge and understanding of how to promote students' skills in reading, writing and mathematics in all lessons are not well developed.
- Not all teachers make sure that the work they give students takes full account of what they already know. This means that students sometimes start on tasks that are too easy for them.
- Changes and weaknesses in leadership in the past have meant that improvements in the quality of teaching, students' achievement and their personal development did not develop as quickly as leaders and governors intended in the first year.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has established a positive and supportive climate in school. There is a clear sense of purpose and teamwork is strong.
- Leaders and governors are now driving improvement at a rapid pace. This is leading to improvements in teaching, students' learning and progress and their behaviour and attendance.
- Teachers and support staff have good relationships with students and manage them very well.
- Students typically behave well in school and at other providers. Many make marked improvements in their behaviour and attendance.
- Students are kept safe while they are at school, on 'challenge days' and at other providers. Their parents agree that they are well looked after.
- The governing body is highly supportive of the school and offers a good degree of scrutiny and challenge.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in seven parts of lessons, five of them jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- One inspector visited students attending off-site provision. She also observed a group of students taking part in a 'challenge day'.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, subject leaders, the coordinator of provision for special educational needs and other staff with responsibility for students' welfare and attendance and aspects of the curriculum. They also met with the Chair of the Governing Body, another governor and a headteacher from a local school. The inspectors met a small group of students and spoke to other students informally at different times throughout the inspection.
- Parents' views were not available on Ofsted's website. An inspector met with three parents or guardians and took account of the responses parents had made to a recent survey carried out by the school.
- Inspectors looked at the completed questionnaires returned by 10 members of staff.
- The inspection team also looked at a wide range of information about the school's work. This included the school's website, a number of policies and procedures, including for protecting students and keeping them safe, information about students' attainment, progress and attendance, minutes of meetings of the governing body and future plans. An inspector also looked at students' work in their books during lessons.

Inspection team

Linda McGill, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Morris-King

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- REACH was established in September 2013 as an alternative provision free school by the Birmingham South Network of Schools. It is overseen by the REACH Free School Trust. The governing body comprises members of the trust.
- REACH admits students who are at risk of permanent exclusion or who have not been thriving in school. It also considers students who are newly arrived in the area without a school place. All students are referred to the school via a panel. Currently, all students are in Years 10 and 11. Some have arrived part-way through Key Stage 4. Many have experienced disruption to their education in the past. A few students are dual registered with a mainstream secondary school.
- The students come from a broad range of backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of the local area.
- REACH identifies all of its students as having special educational needs. None has a statement of special educational needs.
- The school receives additional funding (the pupil premium) for four fifths of its students. This is well above the national average. The funding is to support the learning of disadvantaged students or children who are looked after by the local authority.
- About half of the students attend other providers for part of the week. These alternative providers are: Envirohort, Gordon Franks Training and Kitchen Garden Café. Other students take part in work-related learning at a range of local businesses for one day each week.
- All students take part in a 'challenge day' one day every week. Students take part in a range of activities away from school that are designed to promote their personal and social skills as well as their enjoyment.
- There have been changes of staff at senior leadership level since the school opened. The deputy headteacher joined the school in March 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and make sure that students make the best possible progress by:
 - strengthening teachers' knowledge and understanding of the best ways of promoting students' skills in reading, writing and mathematics in all lessons
 - making sure that teachers take full account of what students already know and can do when planning and setting work, so that no time is wasted
 - increasing the chances students have to read widely, at length and for pleasure
 - making sure that all teachers follow the school's agreed method for marking students' work and telling them how they can make it better, and that students have the chance to respond.
- Increase the impact that leaders and managers have on students' learning and progress by:
 - ensuring that all students have access to 25 hours of teaching each week and that governors rigorously enforce this
 - amending the timetable so that no students miss out on assemblies, work they have missed or other important aspects of the school week
 - strengthening procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of aspects of the school's work such as 'challenge day' and students' progress in smaller work-experience placements so that adjustments to provision can be made if necessary
 - continuing to make every effort to work with students and their families to increase attendance and close the gap on the average for all schools.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- REACH school did not get off to the flying start that was intended. Weaknesses in senior leadership combined with the move to a new building meant that the headteacher had a lot to deal with. Procedures such as those for managing the performance of staff were not as robust as they should have been and systems for tracking students' progress were not wholly useful. Nevertheless, progress was made over the school's first year and is gaining momentum in the second. The leadership team is now secure and driving improvement at the rate that is needed to improve students' achievement to good.
- The current timetable is not well organised. Not all students receive the 25 hours of teaching each week to which they are entitled, nor do all students have the chance to attend an assembly. Leaders know this and have begun to plan for improvements from the start of the next academic year that will enable all students to have equal access to and benefit from all that the school offers.
- Leaders' evaluation of aspects of the school's work is not always as sharp as it should be. For example, the impact of the 'challenge day' on students' personal development and attitudes is carefully tracked, but it has not been evaluated to see whether it is clearly linked to improvement in their progress back at school.
- Overall attendance at the end of the school's first year was low. It is now rising because of the clearly understood policy and procedures that are consistently applied by staff.
- Because the school is small, there is only one teacher for each subject. Leaders of English and mathematics are helping other staff to promote skills in reading, writing and mathematics wherever possible in lessons. The approach is not yet fully effective and they are working to strengthen teachers' subject knowledge in order to bring about improvements.
- Staff and students speak highly of the headteacher's leadership and high expectations. The headteacher has created an atmosphere in which all feel valued and respected. There is a strong sense of purpose and self-belief amongst staff which contributes to improvements in students' behaviour and to the quality of teaching. Students said that relationships between staff and students are good and there is no discrimination of any kind.
- Teachers have been set targets that reflect higher aspirations for the students. Staff are increasingly held to account for their effectiveness, but also given plenty of opportunity to learn from the good practice of others or to share expertise of their own.
- Pupil premium funding is spent appropriately on those students for whom it is intended. Last year, it was targeted largely on careers education, information, advice and guidance. This was successful in helping almost all eligible students to go on to education, training or employment at the end of Year 11.
- The curriculum focuses rightly on English, mathematics and science. Students choose from other subjects and have the chance to study for at least five GCSE examinations. 'Challenge days' enrich the curriculum. They are part of a programme of carefully planned activities designed to develop students' personal and social skills, particularly their resilience in the face of situations that challenge them physically or mentally, such as underground caving, bush-craft or learning to canoe. Many students enjoy these days and participate well. The progress of some is hampered by their sporadic attendance.
- The scheme of work for personal and social education includes many topics that are relevant and useful to the students in preparing them for life after school in modern Britain. Not all students benefit from the well planned assemblies because timetabling arrangements mean they regularly miss them. Students understand the need for values such as tolerance and respect and many show these in their behaviour. They regularly raise funds for charities and learn to see things from different perspectives.

- Students participate in work-related learning for a day each week from the time they join the school. The school has developed good relationships with a range of local employers and training providers and the placements are carefully matched to the students' needs and interests. Their attendance and attitudes at their placements are monitored carefully. Larger providers give the school regular updates on the progress students are making with their specific work-related skills. The school does not track students' progress formally in the smaller work placements and so cannot celebrate success or build on weaknesses as well as it might.
- The staff know individual students and their circumstances well. Good attention is paid to making sure that staff understand what to do if they have concerns about a student's well-being. Leaders have made sure that staff understand the risks that vulnerable young people face, for example, from child sexual exploitation or radicalisation, and that they know what to look out for. Arrangements for protecting students and keeping them safe both in and out of school are robust and meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Many of the governors are serving headteachers and have much to offer the school in terms of knowledge and expertise. Other governors bring financial expertise and a parent's perspective. The governing body meets regularly and there is frequent contact between the Chair and the headteacher. Governors are highly supportive of the school, but also offer a good degree of scrutiny and challenge. However, although governors know that some students are not receiving their full teaching entitlement, they have not pursued this rigorously enough.
 - Governors have made sure that the headteacher was supported and mentored during her first year of headship and beyond.
 - Governors receive regular reports, including information about students' progress, their attendance, and the quality of teaching. Governors know how good teaching is promoted, weaker teaching challenged and how teachers are rewarded for their performance. They have ensured that safeguarding procedures are rigorous.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students who attend regularly make great improvements in their behaviour and attitudes to learning during their time at the school. They typically behave well in school and at their placements, and are respectful of staff and one another. This makes a positive contribution to their learning.
- In lessons, students persevere with their work and usually complete what is required of them. They work together in pairs or groups, and look out for one another. There is occasionally some low-level chatter, but this does not disrupt the learning of others.
- Occasionally, students' body language gives the impression that they are not interested or paying attention. However, this is deceptive, when a well-thought-out response is given to a question reveals that students have been listening and thinking carefully all along.
- Students behave well and enjoy events such as 'challenge day'. On a cold and windy day during the inspection, a group of students enthusiastically learned to canoe on a reservoir, helping and supporting each other and giving encouragement. One group enjoyed some healthy competition, seeing who could paddle backwards the fastest without capsizing.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. This is because although overall rates of attendance are improving, they are still low and too many students miss quite a lot of school. The efforts of staff to raise the importance of attendance with students and their families are beginning to pay off, but there is still some way to go before the attendance of all students is as regular as it should be.
- Students have no concerns about their safety at school or at their placements and this was echoed by

their parents and guardians. They said that bullying was not a problem at the school and that teasing and name-calling were infrequent. They said that people are not picked on because of their appearance, beliefs or sexuality. This is confirmed by the school staff.

- Students are taught to recognise and understand the risks that they may face in their lives, including on the internet. During this inspection, students listened attentively to a presentation on 'precious lives' given by the West Mercia Police.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- There are inconsistencies and some variability in teaching which mean that students do not always make as much progress as they could in lessons and over time.
- Sometimes, all students begin work from the same starting point. Tasks are not adjusted or additional challenge added when teachers spot that students already have a good understanding of what they are learning. This means that some students mark time. In contrast, in other lessons students have the scope to choose their own starting point, work through tasks at a pace that suits them and challenge themselves to achieve more highly. This works well.
- All teachers are expected to include opportunities to reinforce skills in reading, writing, mathematics and information and communication technology in their lessons, where appropriate. However, not all are equally skilled in doing so and some require further support in knowing how to plan for opportunities that are meaningful and relevant. All classrooms contain helpful 'word walls' that include subject-specific vocabulary to which students refer during lessons.
- There is a positive climate for learning in lessons. Teachers and support staff are adept at managing the students' behaviour and responses. They know when to press for a response and when to give someone time to think. Subtly but skilfully they make sure all students contribute. Teachers often use humour to help bolster students' enjoyment and increase their confidence.
- Support staff work closely with individual students who need particular help. Their deployment is carefully thought out by the teacher.
- Students' reading ages are tested when they start at REACH. Where their reading ages are substantially lower than their actual age, students are given personalised support to help them improve. However there are few opportunities for students to read widely, at length or for pleasure. This means that they do not catch up as quickly as they could.
- One-to-one support is also given to students who need extra help with writing or mathematics. This helps them improve their knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers assess students' attainment and progress regularly and track how well they are moving on from the baseline assessment carried out when they started at the school. They make sure that students know what grades they are working at and what they are aiming for, both from the baseline assessment and taking account of what the students achieved at the age of eleven.
- The school's approach to marking has been amended and teachers are expected to give students feedback on what went well, where improvement is needed and how this could be achieved. Not all teachers are implementing this approach fully and there is still quite a lot of marking that comprises only ticks and positive comments. Teachers do not always give students the chance to respond to their comments or make corrections. In addition, several teachers do not model good handwriting.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Many students start at REACH following periods of disruption to their education. Baseline assessments show that most have fallen well behind and have not made the progress they should have. Many students

attained the levels expected of them at the age of eleven and so have the potential to attain as well as students nationally. So far, however, none have done so.

- At the end of 2014, almost all of the school's first cohort of Year 11 students gained at least one GCSE pass. A small proportion gained five passes at any grade. Although many students made up some lost ground during their short time at REACH, these outcomes represented poor progress since the age of eleven.
- This year, examination results are predicted to improve considerably. Students' attainment is tested every half term using past GCSE papers and standardised tests. These assessments indicate that every student is set to pass at least one GCSE examination, and that over two thirds are anticipated to gain five passes at any grade. This represents much better progress for these students, and a narrowing of the gap on where they should be. Work in students' books and observations in lessons confirmed that many students are making up lost ground.
- The students this year have more opportunities to gain accreditation in a range of different courses. For example, the personal social and health education programme students are following now leads to a qualification.
- Not all students, however, are making the rapid progress that is needed to help them make up for prior underachievement. Some, but not all of these students are those whose attendance is erratic or poor.
- Last year, students were entered early for examinations in English and mathematics. This was intended to boost students' confidence. They did not stop studying the subjects, however, and all took the examinations again six months later. Although a considerable proportion improved their result in English, most did not in mathematics. All students who sat the GCSE examination in English in January this year gained at least a pass. The decision was taken not to enter students early for mathematics this year.
- There are no discernible gaps between the rates of progress of students supported by pupil premium funding and other students in the school.
- Students who attend work-related learning placements make the progress that is expected and achieve success in the courses they follow.
- Many students make good progress in developing the personal and social skills and attributes that they will need to be successful as they take the next step into education, training or employment.

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	139671
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	450281

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	13–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tim Boyes
Headteacher	Nicola Redhead
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0121 675 8989
Fax number	n/a
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