

Retford Oaks Academy

Babworth Road, Retford, DN22 7NJ

Inspection dates 12–13 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students' progress is variable in lessons and over time, including in the sixth form, because teaching is variable.
- Overall, not enough students make good progress by the end of Year 11.
- Work set for students is sometimes too hard and often too easy to ensure students make good progress and have positive attitudes to learning.
- Marking does not consistently help students to know how to improve their learning and teachers do not check that, when advice is given, students respond to it.
- Students do not have regular enough chances to practise and develop specific literacy and numeracy skills in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- The quality of education in the sixth form requires improvement because the teaching does not provide a consistently high level of challenge. As a result, not enough students make good progress from their starting points.
- Expectations of individual students' attendance rates are not high enough. Some students achieve less well than they could because they do not attend school regularly.
- Teachers are not held sufficiently to account for the quality and quantity of students' learning.
- Subject leaders do not yet all have the responsibility, training or skills to check teaching and achievement accurately.
- Best practices are not regularly shared with the staff who are trying hard to improve their teaching.
- Teachers' performance targets are not all equally measurable or challenging to ensure teaching improves as quickly as possible.
- Half of the staff who expressed a view are not fully on-board with the Principal's actions because communication has not been effective in ensuring their support.

The school has the following strengths

- Students are now making good progress in English.
- Students feel safe in school and trust the staff to support them with any issues that they have.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is promoted well, including through the curriculum.
- Behaviour outside of lessons is good. Students respect their school and each other.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well because teaching and support for these pupils are good.
- Vulnerable students make good gains in their academic and personal development because of very good planning for their needs.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed a wide range of teaching. They watched several lessons with either the Principal or with individual members of the senior leadership team.
- The inspectors talked with students during lessons and also at break and lunch times. They met formally with four groups of students to find out what they think about their school.
- The inspectors also held meetings with senior and subject leaders, heads of house, members of the governing body, the chief executive of the Trust and the Trust's improvement officer.
- The inspectors looked at numerous documents about the school's work, starting with the school's information about the achievement of all groups of students. They checked the school's development plan and its impact on driving improvement, including in the sixth form. They looked at samples of students' work and checked records of their behaviour, attendance and the policies to help ensure they stay safe.
- The inspectors took into account the 43 responses to the Ofsted on-line parental questionnaire (Parent View) and the 45 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Lynne Blakelock, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Nigel Griffiths	Additional Inspector
Sian Hampton	Additional Inspector
William Morris	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than others of its type. It is increasing in size.
- It is sponsored by the Diverse Academies Learning Partnership and is part of the Diverse Academies Trust which works with five other academies in the county.
- The Trust oversees the school's work, provides support to the governing body and provides help and challenge for teaching and leadership.
- Most students are of White British heritage and almost all speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students known to be disadvantaged and, therefore, supported through the pupil premium is average. The pupil premium funding is additional government funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The school works in partnership with 12 local primary schools to support transition.
- It provides alternative provision for students at 'Good Apple' in Gainsborough.
- The sixth form is housed in a separate, shared post-16 centre close to the main school site. The school works with The Elizabethan Academy and with North Nottinghamshire College to provide jointly managed provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the quality of teaching, including in the sixth form, to enable students to make rapid and sustained progress, and to ensure positive attitudes to learning by making sure that:
 - teachers provide work that is based accurately on students' standards so that they learn rapidly
 - marking tells students how to improve and teachers ensure that students respond to this
 - students practise specific literacy skills in other subjects, so that they strengthen their grammatical, punctuation and spelling skills
 - numeracy skills are practised in other subjects so that students develop a greater mastery of mathematics
 - best teaching practices are shared across the school.
- Improve students' attendance rates through Key Stages 3 and 4 by giving students individual goals for attendance and reinforcing the link between good attendance and good progress.
- Strengthen and quicken the impact of senior and subject leadership on teaching and achievement, including in the sixth form, by ensuring that:
 - teachers take responsibility for the quality and quantity of students' work
 - subject leaders, supported by senior leaders, have the responsibilities, training and skills to check accurately, regularly and robustly the quality of teaching and the work in students' books in their subjects and act quickly on their findings
 - performance targets are equally measurable, achievable and challenging in driving improvements in teaching
 - the Principal and senior leaders communicate regularly with the staff and listen and address their concerns so that there is more of a shared vision for the school.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Students do not make good progress over time. Leaders are not checking students' work and the quality of teaching in sufficient detail to have a fully accurate picture of students' performance.
- The school acted very quickly after the unexpected and disappointing 2014 results. Its audit highlighted weaknesses in teaching and leadership that the school had not previously identified.
- Consequently, the Trust and governing body tightened systems after the 2014 results to check students' progress and appointed two executive assistant Principals to identify the barriers to progress and to monitor English and mathematics.
- Supported exceptionally well by the Trust, and by the governing body, school leaders are making sustainable improvements. The Principal knows the issues and the school's leadership has been strengthened by appointments at senior level that are ensuring a secure foundation for improvements.
- Expectations of students' achievement and the quality of teaching are much higher than they previously were. Teaching is improving and the rates of progress are quickening. Much more is expected of the staff who are working hard to meet the school's targets. Senior leaders have taken, rightly, hard decisions to improve the school's performance. However, in his efforts to move the school forward as quickly as possible, the Principal does not have the support of half of the staff who responded to the questionnaire.
- The school has detailed data which it is beginning to use as a basis for checking the rate of students' progress, including in the sixth form. While subject leaders are responsible for checking that the rate of pupils' progress increases, they are not ensuring that school policies, such as marking, are consistently implemented. Work scrutinies are too irregular, giving senior leaders an over-optimistic perception of the quality of some students' learning.
- The leader of teaching and learning is tenacious in her efforts to improve teaching and is having an increasing impact in securing improvements through bespoke coaching and regular staff training. However, judgements about teaching are based on brief observations and do not give a fully accurate picture of the quality of teaching across the school.
- The steps taken by leaders to improve teaching and learning and reward good teaching are not always effective. This is because the targets set are not always clear about what has to be achieved to secure a pay rise.
- The leader with responsibility for pupil premium ensures that each student receives support according to his or her academic and personal needs and, most importantly, that all staff check their progress very regularly. The gap between the performance of pupils supported by the pupil premium and other pupils is narrowing as a result.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are supported very appropriately and their good progress reflects this. The provision for and support of vulnerable students is a strength of the school, including in the alternative provision, that gives some students a real sense of worth and empowerment. The sixth form leader is improving the sixth form in which pastoral care is a strength.
- The curriculum is planned well regarding the choice of subjects and courses. Good progress has been made in developing the new curriculum and the new methods of assessment. Students like their range of courses and say that they have a good choice of subjects, including in the shared sixth form provision. The school knows that its provision for teaching aspects of the broader curriculum, for example, extremism, the promotion of British values, careers education and financial management has not been consistently effective. Appropriate changes have already been made to make this a much stronger aspect of the school's work.
- Leaders are in the process of planning a comprehensive programme to rectify this and to ensure that

students are armed with the information that they need to make informed judgements, including through exercising their democratic rights. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is promoted well, overall, with particular strengths in teamwork and their growing appreciation of other cultures, through the curriculum. The school encourages harmony through its ethos of care and it does not tolerate discrimination.

- Because teaching is variable, not all students have an equal opportunity of being successful in their academic work.
- The school cares for its students well, including those who attend alternative provision and students who are vulnerable. Safeguarding procedures meet the statutory requirements, with examples of good practice in child protection arrangements. The attendance of some students is improving because of the arrangements made for vulnerable students in how and where they learn. Systems to check behaviour are robust and good progress has been made in checking and addressing attendance issues more promptly and in detail.
- The school ensures that students, whatever their needs, settle well into the school because of good transition arrangements. Its Trust partnership is providing greater strength in leadership, particularly in identifying rates of progress and where improvements most need to be made.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Aided by the Trust, with whom it works very well, the governing body is improving as a challenging partner by having higher expectations of leaders and staff and being better informed about the hard decisions it takes in its attempts to move the school forward more quickly
 - The governors participate in regular and varied training which helps them to challenge the school widely.
 - Governors speak knowledgeably of the school. They are able to do this because they meet very regularly with the Principal and other leaders and lead monthly strategy meetings to discuss the school's performance and how it is improving. They use the school improvement plan as the basis for measuring the school's progress.
 - The governors instigated a review of pupil premium spending and impact. They know that initiatives for pupil premium students are leading to a narrowing of the gap, albeit with further to go.
 - The governors are careful with the school's money and check it is being used well to improve the school's performance. The budget balances.
 - The governing body understands the value of performance management targets in improving teaching, and governors are increasingly aware of the quality of teaching. Governors demonstrate both careful use of money and their high expectations in not awarding pay rises unless staff meet their targets.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Although many students are really keen to learn and always concentrate, in lessons where teaching does not interest them some students become inattentive and restless and talk about matters that have no relation to the lesson. This slows learning down.
- Students' behaviour around the school and site and at break and lunchtimes is good. Students like the school, and they respect the building and each other.
- The school uses the behaviour policy consistently and provides effective support for students who find it hard to manage their behaviour. As a result, exclusions are falling.
- The school council enables students to practise their democratic rights and to discuss with the staff ways to improve the school. They are pleased, for example, with the improvements they have negotiated in the canteen.

- Students who learn at other sites behave well and try hard to achieve success in their courses.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Students feel safe in school, including those who learn at other sites because the school makes regular checks to ensure their well-being.
- There is not very much bullying and the staff deal quickly with any incidents.
- Most parents agree that the school is a safe place and their children are cared for well.
- Students know how to keep themselves free from cyber-bullying because the school regularly reinforces the message. They know that people can be bullied in a variety of ways and for a range of reasons.
- They do not understand what British values are, although they are evident in some of their actions. Nor can they explain extremism and radicalisation and why they are dangerous to society.
- Attendance remains below average, with only a small improvement in recent years and with weaker attendance in Years 9 and 11. Although it is a small number of students, mostly girls, who are persistently absent and who most pull attendance rates down, the school does not have sufficiently high expectations of other students' attendance. There are more rigorous systems for checking attendance now which are starting to make a difference.
- Students who learn off-site attend regularly because they feel more comfortable in the provision. They also feel safe because of good arrangements to safeguard them.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable to ensure that students make rapid progress. There are inconsistencies in a range of practices that slow their progress.
- Data about students' progress are not always used to plan work at the right level for all students. This results in some students becoming inattentive because the work is either too hard or too easy for them. Students' progress slows as a result.
- Occasionally, teachers are so keen to get through what they have planned, that learning is superficial and narrow. The teaching does not build during the lesson and students do not move forward in what they know, understand or can do.
- Although the school understands the importance of improving students' literacy skills, teachers do not focus sufficiently on key words or emphasise the importance of accurate pronunciation, grammar and spelling.
- While there are regular opportunities for students to read, particularly in Key Stage 3, this time is not always used to best effect, for example, in tutor time. Leaders have rightly recognised this and are changing the format of these sessions. There is regular, good support for students who find reading difficult to enunciate words accurately.
- While the school has focused on the quality of marking, there remains some considerable variability in its regularity and in how well it helps students to make further progress. Students do not always respond to the advice given by the teachers to help them make quicker progress.
- Some teaching is effective and very effective in promoting students' quick progress. Questioning is a strength in promoting quicker progress because teachers vary the level of questioning to match the levels

at which students work. They extend their questioning to make students think more deeply and evaluatively. This was evident in an English lesson in Year 10 where students were able to evaluate a range of texts effectively because of how the teacher had made them think.

- In mathematics lessons, students increasingly practise what they have learned through problem-solving, although work is not always sufficiently challenging. However, they do not get enough chances to practise their numeracy skills in other lessons. Over time, therefore, some students, more so, those working at lower levels, do not retain what they have learned in mathematics when it comes to examinations.
- Teaching assistants help students who find learning hard to secure their skills, especially in English and mathematics. They also build up the confidence of students so that they can achieve.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Not enough students make good progress because teaching is variable. Students' attitudes to learning are also variable, depending on how well teaching suits their needs.
- In 2014, the proportion of students achieving five GCSE A* to C grades, including in English and mathematics, fell to well below average.
- Students achieved well at the higher National Curriculum levels in information and communication technology, but this was not the case in other subjects. Students learned less well in, for example, some sciences and in physical education.
- Students' progress has been variable over time and, in 2014, was well below that expected in mathematics. It improved in English, however, and was broadly in line.
- The school's data shows students are on track for improved performance in 2015, and for all groups of student, including those in Key Stage 3, to continue this trend. Inspection evidence from students' current work shows students have made expected progress through the school during the current academic year, with pockets of good progress in a few subjects.
- In mathematics, the proportion now making expected progress is in line with that seen nationally. In English, data points to an above proportion making expected and better than expected progress in the subject.
- Although the gap in achievement between disadvantaged and other students is narrowing because of a range of support, including one-to-one tuition and a popular on-line system, disadvantaged students made slower progress than other pupils in 2014. The gap between the proportion of students achieving A* to C grades in English and mathematics halved in 2014 to two-thirds of a grade behind students not supported by pupil premium funding. Compared to nationally, disadvantaged students were just under one grade behind students nationally in English, and just over one grade in mathematics. School's data shows that the gap has continued to reduce this year. However, disadvantaged students' progress requires further improvement.
- Students with special educational needs learned well last year and continue to achieve well this year. This is due to carefully planned and specific support for their needs.
- The very few students who speak English as an additional language progress well from their individual starting points.
- The most able students achieve well when teaching demonstrates high expectations of their work and is based on the standards at which they are working. Sometimes, the work they are given is too easy and this is reflected in their level of interest and in their failure to develop those skills that encourage them to be critical and to produce balanced arguments.

- Those students who have not reached the expected standards in English and mathematics, by the end of primary school, receive specific help to improve their basic skills. Last year, the large majority reached the expected levels in both English and mathematics by the end of Year 7 and the remainder made good progress.
- Students who find reading hard have regular chances to practise their skills. They make secure gains in their learning. Texts are often used well in a range of lessons to enable students to practise reading.
- Students who learn off-site make good gains in their personal, social and emotional skills and in their attendance and behaviour. This is because courses and pastoral support are helpful in encouraging them to try hard.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Forty-five per cent of students joined the sixth form from Year 11 in 2014. This year, it is expected to be 61%. Ninety-two per cent of students in Year 12 stayed on into Year 13 last year and finished their courses. At the end of Year 13, all students carried on into further or higher education or went into training or employment.
- Students join Year 12 with standards that are broadly average. A very few students join without having gained at least GCSE grade C passes in English and mathematics, so they re-take the examinations. In 2014, they achieved at least a C grade in English but were unsuccessful in mathematics.
- Students reach average standards by the end of AS and A level, which represents their broadly expected progress from their starting points. They do not make better progress because, as in the rest of the school, teaching is not consistently good. It lacks sufficient challenge for some students to enable them to achieve well over time or to develop the skills that they need to achieve the highest grades.
- Students choose from a wide range of academic courses, at different levels. Few, however, study more than three courses.
- The leadership of the sixth form is improving but requires further improvement. The leader works well with other leaders of the shared sixth form to ensure that students learn more widely through a programme of enrichment and that their progress is tracked.
- Students appreciate the support and guidance that they are given, including the options open to them after school. They get good advice about careers, go on work experience and know how to stay safe. They understand what British values are and appreciate the democratic principles on which society operates.
- Students understand the importance of good attendance habits and attend very regularly. They behave well. They really appreciate the learning environment in the sixth form centre and what one student described as the bridge it serves in their journey into independence.
- Their wider preparation for life extends to helping out younger students at Retford Oaks and also at primary schools. Some act as reading mentors.

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	137117
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	461973

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	775
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Quigley
Principal	David Gibson
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2013
Telephone number	01777 861618
Email address	office@retfordoaks-ac.org.uk

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