

# Robert Owen Academy

Blackfriars Street, Hereford, HR4 9HS

## Inspection dates

19–20 May 2015

| Overall effectiveness          | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected |          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------|
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Inadequate</b>        | <b>4</b> |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Requires improvement     | 3        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Inadequate               | 4        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Inadequate               | 4        |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Inadequate               | 4        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Teaching is not challenging enough to help students make rapid progress in order to reach the standards of which they are capable.
- Teachers do not use the information that is available to them to plan work at the right level for different groups of students. The most-able students, in particular, are not sufficiently challenged.
- Marking does not help students to improve their work.
- Students do not consistently demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, particularly where teaching is weaker. They behave poorly, become distracted and do not work hard enough.
- The number of exclusions is high and many students have been excluded more than once.
- Students do not attend the academy regularly enough and too many students are absent frequently. As a result, leaders cannot be confident that these students are safe.
- In the first year of the academy, leaders, governors and trustees did not have a strong enough impact on the quality of teaching, achievement, and behaviour and safety.
- Leaders do not use the information that is available to them about achievement and behaviour to systematically inform actions and evaluate their impact.

### The school has the following strengths

- The Principal and the recently appointed Vice Principal have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve the academy. Leaders are tackling weaknesses with determination.
- Staff care about the students' welfare and develop positive relationships with the students.
- Students value the vocational ethos of the academy and make faster progress in practical subjects.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 12 lessons to observe learning and behaviour, to talk with students and to examine displays. The Principal and Vice Principal accompanied inspectors during two of these observations.
- Inspectors spoke with, and listened to, groups of students and looked at a range of their work from different subjects. The inspectors observed the behaviour of students at the start of the day, during break times and at lunchtime. They also spoke to students informally around the school.
- Inspectors met with the Principal, Vice Principal, the vulnerable learner coordinator, teachers, the Chair of the governing body and three trustees.
- Responses from ten parents to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire, and the eleven questionnaires that were returned by staff, were taken into account.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, which included: the school’s check on how well it is doing and plans for improvement; evidence about how teachers are set targets to improve students’ progress; records of the school’s checks on the quality of teaching, minutes of meetings of the governing body, information about students’ progress over time; and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

|                              |                         |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Simon Mosley, Lead inspector | Her Majesty’s Inspector |
| Deborah James                | Her Majesty’s Inspector |

## Full report

*In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.*

### Information about this school

- Robert Owen Academy is a very small 14-19 free school. It is part of a single school academy trust.
- It opened for students in Year 10 in September 2013 and now has students in Years 10 and 11. Post-16 provision is planned to start in September 2015.
- The academy has been situated on two sites and is due to gain access to additional vocational work areas before the end of this academic year. Three Principals have led the academy since it opened and the current Principal took up post in September 2014.
- Almost all students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported through the pupil premium (additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in the care of the local authority) is above the national average.
- Three students in Year 10 attend Walford and North Shropshire College for one day a week.
- The first group of students in Year 11 will sit their examinations the summer of 2015. Consequently, it is not possible to compare academy data to the government's current minimum standards.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching to ensure that all students achieve well by:
  - strengthening teachers' understanding of the prior attainment of students so that they plan lessons that are pitched at the right level to challenge all students, particularly the most able, to make rapid progress
  - providing activities that sustain students' interest and motivation to make sure that they are fully engaged in all lessons
  - ensuring marking in each subject helps students understand what to do next to improve their work.
- Improve behaviour and safety in the academy by:
  - insisting that all staff consistently apply the behaviour policy and have high expectations of students' behaviour at all times
  - systematically analysing the instances of poor behaviour and evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken to tackle low-level disruption and behaviour which leads to exclusions
  - taking concerted action to improve attendance, particularly with parents who condone absence.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
  - analysing achievement data to gain a clear overview of the performance of different groups of students
  - making sure that the pupil premium funding contributes well to students' achievement and personal development and that leaders evaluate carefully the impact of this spending
  - clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of governors and trustees so that academy leaders are held to closer account.

An external review of governance and an external review of the use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management

### requires improvement

- The academy was not well-led and managed during its first year of opening. As a result, the quality of students' experiences was poor. The Principal's actions this academic year have tackled many of the weaknesses. However, these actions have not had time to have had a sustained impact on eradicating the previous considerable weaknesses.
- Leaders have not ensured that teaching sufficiently promotes students' good progress so that they achieve well. However, in both of these areas, there are improvements.
- The Principal has a clear understanding of how to address the academy's weaknesses. He has high expectations of staff and students and, with the support of the Vice Principal, other staff, governors and trustees, he is striving to develop 'academic skills through a vocational curriculum.' In addition to this, the site is more suitable to deliver vocational studies and the academy now has the information technology systems it requires to function effectively.
- An effective system to manage the performance of teachers was introduced in September 2014. Staff targets are focused upon the quality of teaching and students' achievement, and link to the national standards as well as the academy's priorities. Checks on the quality of the work of teachers and other staff are appropriate. Training opportunities and challenge are in place and this has led to improvements in teaching.
- Leaders now track the progress of individual students towards their aspirational targets, which are based on their attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. These regular checks lead to additional support where it is needed. However, the academy's leaders are not monitoring the progress of different groups of students effectively so they do not have a clear overview of achievement across the academy and therefore are unable to intervene when groups of students are underperforming.
- Pupil Premium funding is now allocated to improving outcomes for disadvantaged students. As a result, attendance and progress for this group of students are better than that of other students in the academy. However, the attainment of disadvantaged students is low and their progress does not match that of other students nationally.
- Academy leaders have introduced a coherent behaviour policy and, as a result, exclusions have declined as the year has progressed. Staff, governors and trustees believe that behaviour has improved but they have not closely analysed information about behavioural incidents so they do not have the evidence to support this view. Leaders are not ensuring that staff implement the behaviour policy consistently so a disproportionate amount of incidents take place in certain subject areas.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements. Staff, governors and trustees have received appropriate information and training, and academy staff work closely with other organisations to ensure that students who may be at risk are protected.
- Leaders have introduced systems to promote regular attendance which, while having some success, are not resulting in attendance improving quickly enough. Absence is monitored and followed up but leaders have not been fully successful in ensuring that some parents fully support the academy's actions.
- Academy leaders tackle discrimination and foster good relationships but, as a result of low attendance and inadequate achievement, they do not promote equality of opportunity for all groups of students.
- The curriculum offer for students has improved but they have not had an opportunity to study a modern foreign language or separate sciences. In addition, issues over accommodation and low student numbers have meant that the majority of students have experienced a limited range of vocational subjects. However, some students in Year 11 have spent a day a week on a work placement with local employers and a few students have attended additional college courses.

- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well supported through a programme of assemblies and personal, social, health and citizenship education lessons. All students study a range of religions and have the opportunity to reflect in weekly religious education lessons on the diversity of Britain and about different faiths and cultures. This helps them to prepare for life in modern Britain.
- Students are able to make informed choices about future career paths as a result of good links with employers and colleges and improved careers advice. Consequently, almost all students in Year 11 have employment, education or training places secured for next year.
- The trustees have worked closely with the officers of the Department for Education, the governors and academy leaders to improve the academy. Many of the trustees have a background in education and they are using this to support the staff.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governance has improved since the academy opened but it requires improvement. Initially, governors did not hold leaders to close account but, as they became aware of issues, they took decisive action to change the academy's leadership structure.
  - Governors work extremely closely with trustees. However, their roles and responsibilities have become blurred, with trustees carrying out some of the functions of governors rather than holding the governing body to account.
  - Trustees and governors visit the academy regularly. They have detailed knowledge of the performance of individual staff and students. However, they do not have a broad overview of what this detailed information tells them about the performance of the academy. This prevented prompt action when teaching, achievement and behaviour and safety required immediate action last year.
  - Governors know what constitutes good teaching and they are aware of the strengths in some subjects and weaknesses in others. They understand the procedures put in place by the Principal to manage teachers' performance and they set him appropriate targets.
  - The governing body now receives regular reports from the Principal and covers the appropriate areas in meetings. It is beginning to hold the Principal to closer account but it did not ensure that pupil premium funding was used effectively last year and have not received information about its impact this year.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

are inadequate

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is inadequate. Inspectors saw a range of off-task behaviour in lessons. This including students talking when the teacher is speaking, reluctance to start work promptly and the use of mobile phones. Some students refused to follow basic instructions, such as removing coats, and others were inattentive. Staff had lower expectations of positive behaviour in tutor groups and this resulted in a higher proportion of poor behaviour at this time.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions is very high, with almost half of the students having experienced a period of exclusion. The number has reduced over this school year but the high level of repeat exclusions indicates that exclusion is not an effective sanction for these students.
- The academy's behaviour log contains a similar list of incidents of poor behaviour to those which inspectors observed. In a two-week period, more than sixty such incidents were noted in a range of subjects, but primarily in science. Academy leaders have not yet begun to analyse this information carefully to identify trends and patterns. This means they do not know whether their view that behaviour is improving is well substantiated.
- Students become bored in many lessons because teachers do not give them any activities to complete. Some students lack resilience, choosing to give up on tasks before they have even tried, confident that the teacher or teaching assistant will step in and do the work for them. However, in the lessons where teaching is effective, the majority of students were engaged and made reasonable efforts to complete their work.
- Students often arrive at the academy in Year 10 having had difficulty managing their behaviour in their previous schools. Staff at the academy care deeply about the students and most try hard to keep students

engaged in education.

- Out of lessons, staff always supervise students well and, as a result, most students behave in a reasonable way. Site issues and building work mean that students have no access to outdoor space during the day and they complained of being 'cooped up'.

## Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is inadequate. Attendance is extremely low for most groups of students. Some students who leave home in the morning do not go to the academy and are in an unsafe situation. Improved systems this academic year have led to improvements in attendance for disadvantaged students but absence rates for other groups of students remain very high.
- Many students are absent frequently. Although a high proportion of these students have improved on their very poor attendance in previous schools, they miss too much learning time as a result of persistent non-attendance.
- Students told the inspectors that bullying and name-calling take place within the academy but that this has reduced during this school year. The vast majority of staff and most parents who expressed a view felt that the academy deals effectively with bullying.
- All staff and parents who responded to questionnaires and the vast majority of students spoken to believe that students are safe in the academy. The site is secure and visitors are appropriately checked and monitored. Students are taught to stay safe, including when using the internet, and issues around safety are discussed in personal, social, health and citizenship education.
- The academy's leaders have put effective systems in place to check the behaviour and safety of students who attend Walford and North Shropshire College. Students attend these courses regularly.

## The quality of teaching

## is inadequate

- The quality of teaching in the first year of the academy was poor. Leaders were not able to recruit suitably qualified teachers who could engage the students in challenging activities and this led to slow progress in a range of subjects.
- The academy's leaders have taken actions this academic year that have improved the quality of teaching. They have recruited additional staff and have higher expectations of teachers. Leaders have established a system that supports and challenges teachers to improve their practice and provided training. However, teaching remains inconsistent.
- Although it is too early to assess the full impact of the recent improvement, students are now producing work in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, which is of a better quality than that produced earlier in the year.
- Staff do not have high enough expectations of what pupils should achieve, although these expectations have increased. This means that students do not make the progress of which they are capable. Teachers do not set tasks that match the ability of the students so the most able, in particular, are not challenged to make rapid progress and deepen their understanding.
- Teachers do not use information about students' prior learning to plan interesting, engaging and relevant tasks. Often, students of all abilities listen to the same information and complete the same work. This leads to slow progress and deterioration in behaviour.
- At times, students of all abilities, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, are unwilling to work things out for themselves. They are happy not to attempt tasks and wait for teachers or teaching assistants to complete their work for them.

- Teachers mark students' work regularly and usually include positive and encouraging comments in their feedback. However, their comments rarely give students clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Teaching assistants and teachers work effectively together. They foster positive relationships with the students and care about their well-being. However, they do not always use these relationships to encourage further learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and many teachers use questions to help students gain a deeper understanding of the topics being covered. Their questions are usually targeted at individual students to allow them to think carefully about their work and this improves learning.
- Students learn most effectively in practical and vocational subjects. They enjoy these lessons, carry out activities independently, in pairs or in larger groups and value the work that they are set. This leads to faster progress in these subjects.

### The achievement of pupils

### is inadequate

- Despite recent improvements in teaching and students' attitudes to learning, students are not making the rapid and sustained progress that will compensate for their prior underachievement.
- Students enter the academy with attainment that is below the national average. Students made slow progress in the first year of the academy and they continue to make insufficient progress in science. Senior staff are currently predicting low attainment in this summer's examinations.
- Achievement varies in different subjects and is particularly weak in science. It is better in English than in mathematics and girls in the current Year 11 are producing work of better quality in a range of subjects than that produced by boys. Attainment and progress are currently strongest in the more practical subjects such as art, textiles and horticulture.
- The attainment of disadvantaged students matches the low attainment of other students in the academy. However, from their starting points, students supported through the pupil premium are now making better progress than their peers in school.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similarly slow progress to other students in the academy. Improved teaching and targeted support from teaching assistants has recently improved achievement for this group of students.
- As teaching does not fully challenge them, the most-able students are not making the rapid progress of which they are capable. Consequently, very few students are reaching the highest standards in many subjects.

## 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> | 139895        |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Herefordshire |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 450057        |

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

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                      | Other secondary          |
| <b>School category</b>                     | Academy free school      |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                 | 14–16                    |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                    | Mixed                    |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b> | 49                       |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>               | The governing body       |
| <b>Chair</b>                               | Debbie Gittoes           |
| <b>Principal</b>                           | Andrew Hubble            |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>  | Not previously inspected |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                    | 01432 513120             |
| <b>Email address</b>                       | info@roacademy.org       |

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