

Reading Girls' School

Northumberland Avenue, Berkshire, Reading RG2 7PY

Inspection dates

8 and 9 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders lack urgency in their responses to the decline in outcomes for pupils. Their self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is inaccurate.
- Disadvantaged pupils make poor progress and by the end of Key Stage 4 their achievement is well behind that of other pupils with similar starting points.
- Too little teaching takes account of the different abilities of pupils and what they already know. Often teachers are not clear about how well pupils are doing and cannot give helpful guidance on what pupils need to do to improve.
- Pupils make much less progress in English than those with similar starting points nationally. Pupils who need extra help do not catch up rapidly enough.
- Governors do not challenge leaders robustly about the progress of pupils. They have failed to check that leaders have used the extra funding for disadvantaged pupils well.
- The 16-19 provision does not meet requirements. Leaders do not have a good knowledge of the requirements of 16-19 study programmes and, as a result, learners are not gaining the right skills to succeed.
- Leaders have not carried out all the necessary checks on staff working at the school to keep pupils safe.
- Some groups of pupils do not attend regularly. Steps taken to remedy this have not been effective.
- The leadership and management of teaching is ineffective and action to improve teaching is not working.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils are polite, helpful and keen to do well. They work well together and support each other in their learning.
- The school has effective systems to help pupils who need extra help with social, emotional and medical care.
- Pupils respect and tolerate others from different religious and ethnic backgrounds.
- Many pupils develop good leadership skills by raising funds for good causes and taking part in events out of school hours.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve standards and progress of pupils, especially in English, by:
 - ensuring teachers use assessment information effectively to plan for pupils' different needs and starting points
 - challenging the most able pupils so that all work is sufficiently demanding and enables them to make good or better progress
 - developing whole school approaches that enable disadvantaged pupils and those who are falling behind to catch up rapidly.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - acting quickly to improve the administration of important procedures for safeguarding in the school
 - improving the leadership and management of teaching
 - developing a programme of work experience and other provision in order to meet the requirements of the 16-19 study programmes
 - ensuring that governors challenge leaders more urgently and more often on the progress of current pupils over time, and not relying on information that is only produced annually
 - addressing rapidly the lower attendance of some groups of pupils, especially those who are of White British heritage.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is inadequate

- The school's leaders have an inaccurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. As a result, senior and middle leaders are not able to identify necessary areas for improvement accurately or precisely. The school improvement plan does not identify key strategies that will make the difference required. Consequently, senior leaders have continued with strategies that do not address past shortcomings in pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders at all levels have been too slow to take action to address the recent decline in standards. The quality of leadership in different faculties is variable and leaders are only just beginning to address this.
- As a result of the changes to staffing, leaders are shouldering a greater burden by taking responsibility for more areas of the school. Consequently, the quality of leaders' oversight and development of important aspects of their work is ineffective.
- Middle leaders have usefully chosen to meet together to share ideas but there are few signs of the impact of this work. They acknowledge that there is a lack of consistency in how well individual teachers in their faculties put agreed new approaches into practice. Their understanding and analysis of pupils' progress is not based on sound evidence.
- Work to arrest the decline in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils has been too slow and ineffective. Despite the appointment of a new middle leader to oversee this priority, there is little evidence of any concerted whole school approach to raising standards for these pupils.
- Leaders have introduced a new assessment system across Years 7 to 11 this year. This has been done without adequate consultation and training for staff, and without a clear enough sense of the difference they want the new approach to make. As a result, leaders are unsure about how much progress pupils are currently making, and have lost oversight of the impact of their work on pupils' achievement.
- Leaders' development of the quality of teaching is ineffective. Some leaders are too optimistic in their judgements of the quality of teaching. This is reflected in how leaders manage the performance of staff. Leaders judged that the majority of teachers met their development targets from the previous year, despite the obvious decline in outcomes for pupils.
- Training for staff is ineffective. Senior leaders introduced new strategies this year, for example expecting pupils to use green pens to respond to teachers' feedback, but this and other approaches have not been adopted consistently across the school. The training sessions introduced last year that teachers described as useful have not continued this year.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides an interesting range of subjects. Leaders have recently introduced Spanish as an additional language and pupils have a wide range of vocational choices in Key Stage 4. The school has developed close ties with local businesses, who are regular visitors to the school at careers events, as mentors and work experience partners. There are a wide range of business related activities for each year group and all pupils take part in work experience in Year 10. Pupils take advantage of a range of leadership opportunities, for example leading trials at a mock magistrate's court and taking part in national and regional science competitions.
- The advice and guidance pupils receive are timely and impartial. Nevertheless, too many pupils end up on courses in the sixth form which do not suit their needs, and this leads to large drop-out rates.
- Leaders model good values with regard to equalities and avoiding discrimination. However, the lack of effective assessment compromises their capacity to ensure that all pupils make the progress they should, including those who are disadvantaged. As a consequence, the school does not ensure that all pupils have an equal opportunity to achieve well.
- The local authority has not responded quickly enough to the recent decline in standards. School leaders had to approach the local authority for support. In response, the local education authority has partnered the school with a national leader of education from the London Leadership Challenge. This partnership is very new and has not yet had time to make a difference.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance lacks ambition and rigour. Governors are too quick to explain the recent decline in attainment and progress as a consequence of curriculum changes and new GCSE specifications rather than questioning the quality of teaching, learning and leadership. Governors have an over-generous view of the school's work. Consequently, governors have not scrutinised leaders' decisions over teachers' pay carefully enough: teaching which is not good has been rewarded. They do not look closely enough at pupils' current progress to check standards. They acknowledge that the new system for checking pupils' progress is not yet effective and that they have not challenged leaders sufficiently.

- Governors have not ensured that the pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils has been spent effectively. They have only recently challenged leaders about these pupils' progress, as the gap between their achievements and other pupils has widened. Governors do not demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of the pupil premium and have not focused on the proper use of this funding.
- The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are not effective. Leaders have not ensured that the administration of the single central record and checks on teachers are sufficiently rigorous and accurate. They have not carried out the appropriate risk assessments and checks to ensure that pupils are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Too little of teachers' planning drives learning effectively. In the majority of lessons, teaching does not ensure that pupils of all abilities learn well. Many teachers expect all pupils to complete the same tasks and achieve similar outcomes, regardless of their different starting points. Consequently, pupils who are falling behind and those who find the work easier do not make enough progress. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson on A Midsummer Night's Dream, all pupils were observed completed a missing words exercise that was too difficult for many and insufficiently demanding for some.
- Many teachers do not use the school's new assessment system to support pupils' learning well enough. This is because they are not clear about how it is used to gauge the current progress of their pupils. In some lessons, particularly in mathematics, teachers were seen planning for and checking pupils' work well. However, in the majority of lessons, teachers do not use the assessment information to help them check how well the pupils are doing.
- Most pupils receive little feedback that is helpful. Many pupils are not clear about what progress they have made or what they need to do to further improve, especially in Years 7 to 9. As a result, some pupils do not take care or have pride in their work and too often this is not addressed by teachers.
- Where teaching is strongest, such as in mathematics, teachers are clear about what skills and knowledge they want pupils to learn. As a result, pupils' understanding is checked well and misconceptions are corrected. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on algebra, pupils learnt how to solve quadratic equations because the teacher explained it well, using a range of different strategies.
- The most effective teachers work largely in isolation. This is because leaders do not have a plan for other teachers to learn from the best practice in the school. Useful training, offered in the past, has been discontinued. The visits teachers make to other schools have not yet made an impact on their work because what has been learned is not followed up and exploited by middle leaders.
- The support and help for pupils who need to catch-up in English is not effective. Many staff who are teaching literacy lack appropriate subject knowledge. A reading session seen was not effective as the teaching assistant leading it did not have high enough expectations of the pupils. New leadership of this area is making sure that pupils are using the reading programmes differently now, and in ways that can drive better progress. However it is too early to see the impact of these changes.
- The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is variable. Teaching assistants are based in subjects as well as supporting individual pupils across the school. Additional adults work effectively with pupils when they have clear guidance from the teacher. However, too often this is not the case and they make too little difference to learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements are not secure. Leaders have not made all of the necessary checks on staff and other adults who work with pupils. Many pupils do not understand the dangers of the internet and social media because these are not taught well.
- Pupils show tolerance and interest in different beliefs and cultures. This was well exemplified by a discussion in a Year 9 lesson where pupils sensitively analysed the different attitudes to sexuality in Christianity. However, pupils are unclear about what the key British values are, and cannot speak

confidently about issues such as democracy and express ideas around the rule of law.

- Most pupils are helpful, polite and cheerful. They value the work the school does on developing their leadership skills through, for example, The Duke of Edinburgh Award, taking part in special school events and taking on responsibilities as prefects.
- Pupils feel well cared for on a day-to-day basis. The pastoral support staff know the pupils well and have good links with local provision for pupils who struggle with medical, emotional or social problems. As a result, there is a very supportive ethos and pupils report that when they have a problem they know who to talk to and are confident that the school will support them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- The attitudes to learning of the majority of pupils are positive and they try hard in lessons. In Key Stage 3 behaviour in lessons is often good, although there are a few lessons where pupils lose concentration and are easily distracted. There is occasional disruption to lessons in Key Stage 4. Pupils in Year 11 reported to inspectors that leaders do not always manage this well.
- Pupils work well together and are supportive of each other. When given a chance, they talk with confidence but they are not always eloquent. However, many pupils are unsure about how well they are doing as a result of weak assessment practice by many teachers. Consequently, sometimes pupils lose focus as a result of poor teaching and do not complete the work set.
- Pupils conduct themselves well, move calmly around the building and wear their uniform well. Now and again, a few are slow to get to lessons at the end of break and lunch. Pupils report that very little bullying takes place and when it does happen, school leaders manage this swiftly. Behaviour records show that there are very few racist or homophobic incidents and these are dealt with effectively.
- Attendance is just below the national average, having declined slightly in the last year. Widening gaps between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils, and White British pupils, and others at the school means too many of these groups miss too much school time. School staff track the attendance of individual pupils well but levels of persistent absence remain stubbornly high.
- Exclusions for poor behaviour are reducing in frequency as a result of leaders working closely with other partners in the local authority. White British pupils are excluded more often than others on average.

Outcomes for pupils

are inadequate

- Outcomes for pupils at the school have been low in the past two years. In 2015 too few pupils attained five good GCSEs including English and mathematics compared to similar pupils nationally, despite arriving at the school with average attainment at Key Stage 2. Progress by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2015 was below average in the majority of subjects taken at GCSE and was particularly weak in English.
- The school's new system to measure progress and set targets is not helpful. Leaders are unaware about how well current pupils are doing and how close they are to achieving their targets. Pupils' work shows too wide a variation in quality. Frequently, pupils make less than expected progress as a result of poor staff planning, weak feedback and low expectations of what they can achieve. For example, less than half of White British pupils in the school made the progress expected of them in English and mathematics.
- In a small number of subjects, pupils make better progress. In some modern foreign languages pupils are learning well because of better teaching, for example in French. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils are also successful in chemistry, biology and physics where in 2015, pupils made more than expected progress.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is poor and has not improved in the last two years. The gaps between the outcomes of these pupils and pupils with similar starting points nationally have grown. In English and mathematics in 2015, less than half of disadvantaged pupils made the progress expected of them. This meant that disadvantaged pupils achieved over a grade lower in both English and mathematics than others nationally.
- The most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged overall, as many teachers do not have high enough expectations of what they can achieve. In a drama lesson, for example, pupils who are aiming for the highest grades were working on an activity that would not enable them to achieve at this level. In 2015 only three subjects achieved more than the national average for pupils gaining an A*/A grade.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do not make enough progress. Leaders have invested resources in staffing to achieve smaller class sizes for this group of pupils but have not evaluated the impact of this strategy on their progress. However, the information that is available about the

progress of pupils with special educational needs shows that the additional staff are not making enough of a difference. This is particularly the case in English.

16 to 19 study programmes

are inadequate

- Arrangements for learners in the sixth form do not meet the requirements of the 16-19 study programmes. Several of the vocational courses that learners study do not provide the opportunities for learning in the workplace that they should.
- Leaders have not taken account of the changes to the Government's expectations for sixth form provision since the previous inspection. They have not ensured that learners are following appropriate courses and succeed in good numbers, and that they have the right sets of skills to continue in work or training.
- Some teaching is effective and in these lessons learners enjoy their studies. However, learners do not complete the recommended learning time over the year; this means that some are not able to enrol on more challenging options as they take too long to complete qualifications.
- The outcomes for learners taking vocational courses are poor. Only one in four goes on to study a higher level qualification at the end of their course. Nevertheless, 50% who retake mathematics or English GCSE improve their marks by one grade, which is greater than the national average.
- Too many learners left the sixth form last year prior to completing the course. The number of learners who remain on courses are low with less than two thirds completing them, which is well below the national average.
- Learners do not take part in a good enough range of enrichment activities to develop the skills, attitudes and confidence that will support them moving into the workplace.
- Leaders do not ensure learners know enough about keeping themselves safe or healthy, nor do they promote fundamental British values clearly and strongly enough.

School details

Unique reference number	110096
Local Authority	Reading
Inspection Number	10000516

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	628
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	56
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Kayes
Headteacher	Viv Angus
Telephone number	01189861336
Website	www.readinggirlsschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@readinggirlsschool.net
Date of previous inspection	18 January 2012

Information about this school

- Reading Girls' School is a smaller than average-sized comprehensive school.
- The sixth form is very small and offers Level 1 and Level 2 courses as well as GCSE retakes in mathematics and English.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average.
- Almost two thirds of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest ethnic groups are of White British, Pakistani and African origin.
- Approximately half of the pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The school is supported by a national leader of education from Elizabeth Garret Anderson School.
- A very small number of pupils are taught in alternative provision at Cranbury College, a pupil referral unit which caters for pupils who have emotional, behavioural or medical needs.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons across all year groups apart from Year 11 who were taking mock examinations. Some lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and other staff. They took account of the 51 confidential questionnaires received from staff. They also met with a representative from the local authority and governors.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school's strategic planning, minutes of meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour, and records related to pupils' safety and academic progress. They looked at samples of pupils' work and scrutinised work done in lessons.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at break and lunch times, around the school and in assemblies, tutorial periods and other activities.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally and formally as well as taking into account the 11 confidential questionnaires received from pupils.

Inspection team

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