

Houghton Regis Academy

Parkside Drive, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5PX

Inspection dates

21–22 September 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Senior leaders have not held teachers well enough to account for the progress pupils make in different subjects. As a result, pupils do not make all the progress they could.
- Leaders do not track the progress of different groups of pupils, for example the most able, well enough. This prevents them from identifying and tackling underperformance rapidly.
- Disadvantaged pupils are not supported well enough in some subjects, so they do not always make the progress they could.
- Because they are not challenged and engaged well enough, boys' progress slows during key stage 4. This results in a growing difference between boys' and girls' attainment.
- The Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust Board who have responsibility for governance have not made sure that they have progress information on all groups of pupils, for example the most able. School leaders are therefore insufficiently challenged to improve.
- The quality of teaching is too variable. Some groups of pupils, particularly the most able, underachieve because they are not challenged enough and some are not helped enough to understand their learning.
- Pupils' absence, including persistent absence, is higher than the national average. The school works hard to improve attendance, but the impact of this work on improving it in the most challenging cases is weak.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of their behaviour. Pupils' attitudes to learning and conduct are good.
- Leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is a strength of the school. Pupils receive effective support and make good progress.
- Leaders have implemented a broad and balanced curriculum that provides an appropriate pathway for pupils with different abilities and interests.
- Pupils embody the school's values of respect, equality and safety. Bullying is rare and most parents would recommend the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - increasing the accuracy and quality of the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress, in particular that of the most able and the disadvantaged pupils
 - making sure that members of the trust challenge leaders consistently when performance is not good enough
 - ensuring that senior leaders robustly hold subject leaders to account for improving the progress of different groups of pupils
 - further improving procedures for reducing pupils' absence, especially in the most persistent cases.
- Improve outcomes by:
 - raising the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils and accelerating the progress of boys in Year 10
 - ensuring that pupils' progress in mathematics matches that in English and a greater proportion of pupils achieve a good level in their examination results.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by sharing the effective practice evident in some areas of teaching to support the improvement of weaker elements through:
 - making sure that teachers in all subjects use assessment information effectively to shape activities in lessons so that they meet the needs of different groups of pupils, particularly the most able and the disadvantaged
 - introducing strategies in key stage 4 which enable boys to achieve at least as well as girls in a wide range of subjects
 - ensuring that teachers in all subjects adhere to the school's policy for marking and feedback by giving pupils advice on what they need to do to take the next step in their learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because leaders' monitoring of the progress of groups of pupils, for example the most able, lacks precision. The support provided by Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust for tracking pupil progress and attendance in this small secondary school is not sufficient. School leaders do not always identify when pupils are falling behind and provide them with the support they need quickly.
- School leaders' understanding of the quality and accuracy of assessment and pupil progress information provided to them by some teachers is unreliable. Consequently, in 2016, leaders' predictions about pupil attainment and progress were inaccurate.
- Because they are not held fully to account by senior leaders, subject leaders are not effective enough. Although there is some good teaching, the checks these leaders make on teaching and pupils' learning are not rigorous enough and the improvements they lead lack urgency.
- Trust and school leaders have carried out a review of pupil premium spending and its impact on the outcomes achieved by pupils. They have identified a range of strategies to diminish the differences between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally. The trust is supporting this strategy well but changes are too recent for there to be any measurable impact.
- Pastoral leaders' roles have been too narrowly focused on the well-being of pupils. Training in how to better support good levels of attendance and pupil progress across subjects has only recently been provided. This is starting to result in them giving a sharper focus to breaking down the barriers that prevent pupils from achieving all that they can.
- There were very few responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire and school leaders do not undertake an analysis of parent views. The small proportion of parents who responded to Parent View are happy with the school. Leaders monitor the incidence of complaints, which is low. One parent said, 'The school is excellent at enabling pupils to blossom when they have not been able to elsewhere.'
- The principal's vision and determination have enabled the transition from the school's previous status as a middle school to an 11 to 16 secondary school to be achieved smoothly. This work has ensured that high expectations of behaviour and safeguarding are well established. An ethos of pride in being part of the school is evident among pupils.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant staff changes. Fourteen teachers have left the school and six teachers have taken up new positions. Newly appointed teachers have brought increased specialist subject knowledge, which is enabling the school to offer a suitably wide range of GCSE qualifications.
- Leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is a strength of the school. The school effectively identifies the support pupils need. Staff use the analysis consistently to plan learning that enables these pupils to receive effective support and make good progress.
- School leaders have managed finances skilfully in the transition to being a secondary school. Appropriate changes have been made and a broad and balanced curriculum is

in place in all key stages. This prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. For example, in key stage 3 all pupils have weekly lessons in which they learn about British values. During the inspection, pupils were learning about multiculturalism; they considered how respect and equality help build successful communities.

- A wide range of extra-curricular clubs are offered to develop pupils' sporting, artistic, musical and computing interests. The new Gaelic football club and the recent performance of 'Bugsy' have been popular activities. This extension to the curriculum enables pupils to explore their interests and talents and gives many pupils an extra sense of achievement.
- Leaders' strategies for improving literacy and the use of Year 7 catch-up funding have had a significant impact on pupils' attainment in English in key stage 3. The majority of pupils on the programme make rapid progress and catch up with their peers.
- Leaders have robust processes in place to monitor the safety and achievement of any pupils attending other providers for some or all of their lessons.
- Trust leaders have provided a wide range of training for the school's teachers, which is helping them improve. For example, the newly introduced subject advisers are improving teachers' long-term planning for learning and developing subject leaders' skills.

Governance of the school

- Members of the trust have not ensured that the information they receive from leaders about pupils' achievement is accurate or sufficiently detailed. Consequently, they have not had an informed view of how well groups of pupils are achieving and have not been able to challenge leaders well enough. A new monitoring and evaluation system is in place, which, along with external validation of teachers' assessments, is now giving governors the information they need to fulfil their responsibilities.
- Members of the trust have a clear strategic role in terms of shaping and monitoring the improvement plans of the school. Because they have not sought or received enough information about how effectively leaders are addressing priorities they have not had a robust enough grasp of how well weaknesses are being addressed. For example, they do not know if improvements to pupils' attendance are being made quickly enough. The new strategies in place are helping them resolve this.
- Members of the trust are a regular presence in the school and actively check some aspects of its work such as financial and health and safety arrangements to ensure that the correct procedures are being followed and statutory requirements are met.
- Members of the trust are highly knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures, the school's legal requirements and potential risks to pupils. They use this expertise to provide support to the school and to ensure that leaders and staff maintain up-to-date knowledge and understanding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Child protection procedures are appropriate. Procedures and actions to support vulnerable pupils are coordinated and administered well. Effective liaison with other agencies is in place.
- All staff are fully trained and knowledgeable about the potential risks to pupils and are confident about their responsibilities for identifying and reporting possible child protection concerns. Risks that pupils face and are exposed to are understood. The school's checks during staff recruitment are rigorous and recorded well.

- The academy has fully implemented the government's latest guidance around the 'Prevent' duty to counter radicalisation. This is monitored by the member of the trust who is linked with the academy.
- Pupils understand the different types of bullying and what to do if they have concerns about any safeguarding issues. Leaders use a range of strategies, including assemblies, posters and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons, to effectively support pupils' understanding of how to stay safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers in some lessons fail to challenge pupils because they do not use prior assessment information to plan learning activities that are appropriate for different groups of pupils. For example, work can be too easy for the most able pupils or too little direction is provided for those who need it. This means that some pupils do not make enough progress.
- In some lessons pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use the new knowledge and skills they learn in different ways, so they do not deepen and extend their learning and develop confidence in themselves as learners.
- Where teachers offer feedback in line with the school's policy, such as in English, performing arts and health and social care, it is making a clear difference to the knowledge and understanding of pupils. In these lessons, the guidance offered is used to shape and inform improvements to learning well. In other subjects, however, feedback is ineffective because it is either not understood or not acted upon.
- In contrast, some teachers use their subject knowledge and assessment of the pupils' needs to plan exciting activities and to question pupils effectively. For example, in a science lesson, pupils learned effectively because the teacher used a varied range of activities and searching questions to continually challenge and extend the learning of pupils of different abilities.
- The most able pupils make good progress towards their targets in art, media and health and social care because oral feedback guides and challenges them. A one-to-one feedback meeting in art increased the quality and breadth of artistic research and artistic expression evident in pupils' work.
- Appropriate homework is set consistently using pupil planners. Pupils said that they use their planners every day to help them arrive punctually to lessons, well equipped and ready to learn.
- Leaders are successfully developing a culture in which reading is valued and enjoyed by pupils. The library is popular and well resourced. All pupils read in tutor time each day and class reading books in English are often from a series of books. This encourages pupils to continue the series and read for their own personal pleasure.
- Teachers communicate well with pupils, developing warm relationships and managing behaviour effectively. Pupils commit to their work willingly in the vast majority of lessons; low-level disruption is rare and teachers deal with any issues quickly before they interrupt learning.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Leaders' actions in working with parents where pupils have high rates of absence are not effective and can result in a pupil's welfare being at risk. These pupils do not learn the habits of regular and punctual attendance, which overall is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent has risen since the previous inspection and is above the national average. Recently introduced strategies are effectively starting to address the barriers to pupils attending school.
- Leaders provide a wide range of activities to promote pupils' understanding of careers and post-16 pathways in each year group. Pupils say that they value the information they receive on a range of careers through using specialist computer software and listening to visiting speakers. All Year 11 pupils had an individual careers interview with the principal, who has guided their progress to appropriate further education, employment or training.
- Pupils understand how to stay safe at school and beyond. They have great confidence in the school's ability to prevent different forms of bullying, discrimination and extremism. Any concerns are recorded and followed up thoroughly.
- Pupils understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. This understanding is developed well through food technology and PSHE lessons.
- Leaders closely monitor the attendance and behaviour of the very small number of pupils who are educated away from the school. These pupils receive effective support to secure appropriate outcomes and further education, employment or training.
- The needs of the small number of pupils who are in the care of the local authority are taken seriously and met well, which helps to ensure that they make good progress in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils understand the behaviour policy well. Teachers apply it skilfully and consistently to establish a positive learning atmosphere across the year groups.
- Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of how they should behave and present themselves. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare and the new rewards policy consistently recognises pupils who meet expectations, which positively reinforces the good behaviour.
- Leaders' swift actions to improve inappropriate behaviour before it escalates have reduced rates of fixed-term exclusion. The rates of permanent exclusion have been very low since the last inspection because strategies to identify triggers for poor behaviour and address these are effective.
- The attendance of pupils who attend other providers for some of their curriculum is good. It is carefully monitored and evaluated to ensure that pupils are supported well to develop their social skills and improve their behaviour.
- Pupils' punctuality is good. Pupils arrive at lessons promptly and ready to learn.
- Pupils' conduct in and around the school is orderly. Pupils are respectful towards each other and adults.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Attainment on entry to the academy was extremely low for the small cohort of Year 11 pupils last year. Too few of these pupils made expected or better progress in mathematics and science and the proportion of pupils who gained GCSE grades A* to C in English and mathematics was well below the national average. Achievement is not consistently good across the academy. In Year 11, the difference between the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is not diminishing quickly. Boys' progress is weak in Year 10.
- Assessment information, pupils' work in books and visits to lessons all indicate that pupils' progress in mathematics remains slower than in English in key stage 4. In particular, most-able pupils are not being challenged enough.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not make the progress they should in Year 10, where disadvantaged boys' progress is too slow. However, this is improving in other year groups, especially in Years 7 and 8. School leaders do not thoroughly check or evaluate that what is being provided for disadvantaged pupils on a day-to-day basis is leading to more rapid progress.
- As a result of leaders' actions, pupils' attainment and progress are improving. Pupils' work and assessment information suggest that current Year 11 pupils are on track to achieve significantly better results this year. They are more confident and better prepared for the next stage in their education.
- The academy's focus on literacy across the curriculum is having a positive impact on pupils' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. The use of tutor time to focus on reading is having a positive impact on pupils' basic literacy. This enables pupils to tackle more challenging learning tasks across the curriculum and make more progress.
- In English, science and work-related subjects, pupils' progress has improved significantly and is exceeding that of other pupils nationally.
- The support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is strong and in lessons they are well supported. From these pupils' different starting points, progress is improving well to match that of other pupils in the school.
- Although the proportions of pupils making expected progress are lower in mathematics than in English, they are now much closer to the national average than they were last year. Pupils have made accelerated progress this year, which is already better than that made by previous year groups.
- Pupils' achievement in Years 7 and 8 is improving at a good pace. This reflects the developments being made in the curriculum and in teaching. The progress of the disadvantaged pupils in these year groups is good in mathematics and English. This is enabling them to catch up with other pupils nationally.

School details

Unique reference number	138569
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10011867

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	304
Appropriate authority	Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust
Chair	Wayne Norrie (Chief Executive)
Principal	Martin Bonner
Telephone number	01582 863 294
Website	www.houghtonregisacademy.org
Email address	admin@houghtonregisacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school does not comply with DfE guidance on what academies should publish about the curriculum offer in each year, Year 7 catch-up funding, governance structure, links to Ofsted reports or the annual reports and accounts.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the curriculum offer in each year, Year 7 catch-up funding, governance structure, links to Ofsted reports or the annual reports and accounts on its website.
- Houghton Regis Academy opened in September 2012 under the sponsorship of the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust as a middle school. It has since converted to become an 11 to 16 secondary school. As a middle school it was inspected in July 2014 and judged to require improvement.
- Houghton Regis Academy is a smaller than average-sized secondary school which currently has pupils from age 11 to 16. It entered pupils for key stage 4 approved qualifications for the first time in summer 2016.
- The academy has a high proportion of pupils who are eligible for the additional pupil premium funding.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average.
- Most pupils are White British. There is a higher proportion of boys than girls. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average.
- Alternative arrangements are made to educate some pupils off the school site, at the Academy of Central Bedfordshire.
- The academy met the government's key stage 2 floor standard in 2014 as a middle school. The floor standard is the minimum requirement for attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in every class in this smaller than average secondary academy. A number of these observations were carried out with the principal.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, other members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders and heads of year. The lead inspector met with the chief executive and regional director of the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust.
- Members of the inspection team spoke informally with pupils in lessons, and around the school, as well as holding more formal discussions with a representative group of pupils from each key stage.
- The inspection team took account of the 13 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).
- Members of the team observed the work of the school. They looked at the school's self-evaluation summary, the improvement plan, a range of policies and procedures, documents relating to the work of the trust and the arrangements for ensuring that pupils are safeguarded.
- Documentation reviewed included records of data relating to pupils' attainment and progress, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Simon Webb, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ashlie Hughes	Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Barr	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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