

Diamond Academy

Hillary Road, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 3DP

Inspection dates

4–5 October 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	Good
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

- Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 is well below national expectations and has been since the previous inspection. Although attainment in writing and mathematics has improved, it is still not good enough.
- Key stage 2 pupils do not make enough progress from their starting points. This was especially true for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school's own assessment information of pupils currently on roll suggests improved progress by pupils; however, progress is not yet good.
- The quality of teaching and learning, although improving, is still variable across the school and among subjects.
- Pupils are not sufficiently clear about how to improve their work.
- Leaders do not work sufficiently in partnership with parents to enable them to support their children with their learning.
- Leaders are taking determined action to improve the accuracy of assessment and support teachers' planning. This work has not had enough time to raise pupils' achievement throughout the school.
- Leaders introduced a new curriculum very recently for reading, writing and for subjects such as science and geography. Pupils enjoy these lessons, but it is too early to judge whether this is securing the intended improvement in pupils' achievement.
- Teaching does not ensure that enough pupils make good progress, especially the most able pupils, who find their work too easy. Other pupils would like more help with work that they find difficult.
- Leaders and governors do not regularly check that funding for disadvantaged pupils is being used effectively to ensure that the pupils make the same progress from similar starting points as all pupils nationally.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders' actions to improve pupils' attendance are effective.
- Pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy.
- The new way of teaching subjects as seen in science and German is already enthusing pupils to learn. Consequently, pupils ask probing questions and work well together.
- New leaders have recently introduced systems to reward good conduct and contributions in and outside class. As a result, pupils' behaviour is good.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide high-quality teaching of reading, writing and mathematics.
- Make sure that teachers:
 - use assessment information to pitch work at the right level
 - focus on accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils
 - draw upon the stronger teaching practice in the school.
- Improve assessment by:
 - providing pupils with frequent, clear and detailed guidance, in line with the school's feedback policy, about how to improve their work
 - regularly checking in lessons that pupils make the progress of which they are capable and intervening quickly where this is not the case.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all leaders have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and play a full part in whole-school improvement
 - actively seeking and responding to the views of parents, and helping them to support their children's progress fully
 - monitoring rigorously the effectiveness of the spending of pupil premium funding on the progress of disadvantaged pupils.

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.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The newly appointed executive principal, who divides her time between Diamond Academy and another school in the trust, and the new associate principal have brought drive and energy to the school. They are beginning to know the school well and recognise that the pace of school improvement has been too slow. It is evident, even in the short time that they have been in the school, that this is changing rapidly.
- New leaders have provided a frequent series of training activities this year to familiarise teachers with the school's new reading, writing and mathematics schemes. It is too early to see the full impact of this work across the school, but there are early signs in some classes that pupils are beginning to reap the benefits.
- The executive principal visits classrooms frequently to check on how well teachers are improving pupils' learning. Further support is provided by subject leaders, working alongside teachers in their classrooms. Newly qualified teachers particularly appreciate the frequent and clear support that they receive.
- Although teaching in the school is currently improving, there is still too much variability in learning within classes. Teaching does not always meet the needs of different pupils, and pupils do not consistently understand how to improve their work.
- Work to ensure that assessment of pupils' learning is accurate is still developing. Some disappointing outcomes in July 2016 were a surprise to leaders following inaccurate predictions. More work is planned to ensure that teachers are fully confident in their assessment practices. However, leaders have taken decisive action to ensure that teachers know where their pupils are in their learning and where they have to get to.
- The mathematics and English subject leaders form a mutually supportive team. They check pupils' books together and highlight areas for improvement, which they are beginning to monitor effectively.
- While these subject leaders have already noted inconsistencies among classes, they have not taken actions to address school-wide improvements effectively. For example, they have not ensured that basic English and mathematics skills are developed throughout the whole curriculum. The leader of other areas of the curriculum has only been in post since September. However, there are early signs that the whole team of leaders have a good understanding of their roles and what is needed in the school in order to bring about rapid improvement across the whole school.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. A newly introduced scheme for teaching subjects other than English and mathematics is stimulating pupils' enthusiasm. Teamwork and cooperation are evident, for example, in pupils' investigations of local villages or care for their teeth. However, there has not yet been time to evaluate the impact of the new curriculum on pupils' progress in all areas, including in the application of reading, writing and mathematical skills.
- The talents of fluent German-speaking teachers have been harnessed very effectively to offer pupils good opportunities to listen to and speak the language accurately.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are not currently offered but will be introduced later this term. Pupils told the inspectors that they are looking forward to this development.

- The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is allocated transparently to meet identified priorities. However, in 2016 this was not effective in improving the outcomes for this sizeable group. The impact of the expenditure on outcomes for this group is not audited forensically or consistently enough by leaders and governors.
- The school's use of the additional funding it receives for sport and physical education is used well. Pupils gained self-confidence last year from participation in the Thetford Games, and teaching assistants will be trained to teach physical education across the school. There are plans to reintroduce sporting clubs later in the autumn term.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is developing well. This group of pupils receive effective support from a team that knows and understands them well. The staff who work with the pupils are appropriately trained. The newly appointed coordinator for special educational needs and/or disabilities has already introduced an increasing range of specialist training and has instituted a review of the pupils' needs.
- The school's values support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The school is a harmonious community, with pupils drawn from an increasingly wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Pupils learn to be respectful of one another. The pupil senate enables them to express their views in a cooperative and democratic way that helps to prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- Effective communication with parents and families is at an early stage of development. Leaders have encouraged parents to attend celebration assemblies and social events such as charity coffee mornings. However, parents are concerned about the turnover in leadership since the previous inspection. They would welcome an opportunity to hear from the newly appointed executive and associate principals about new arrangements. The small number of parents that responded to the online questionnaire about the school were negative about various aspects of the school, including the fact that their children are not making good progress.
- The Academy Transformation Trust provides valued support by funding improvements to the school's accommodation. For example, fencing and roofing have been renovated to enhance pupils' safety. The learning environment has also been improved, for example by renovating and restocking the library. The trust supports leaders with frequent visits from improvement advisers who have, for example, helped to identify priorities for the school's self-evaluation and conducted an external review of the school's governance.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is committed to improving the school. They recognise the school's strengths and those weaknesses that have not been addressed rapidly enough since the previous inspection.
- Governors value the support provided by the trust and the training that they receive for their roles. The frequent meetings of the trust progress boards support governors' understanding of what needs to improve, how to put improvements in place quickly and how to use this information to support and challenge leaders.
- The work of the governor responsible for safety and premises is thorough and effective.

- The governor responsible for safeguarding is clear about the governing body's statutory obligations and uses this knowledge to monitor systems well.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and that they are confident to refer any concerns to staff. There is a range of curriculum activities and information from visitors about how to stay safe online.
- Staff training for keeping children safe in education is in place and appropriate checks are made on the suitability of new staff.
- The most vulnerable pupils, including those who are involved with outside agencies for medical care, are well known to staff. The school weaves safeguarding into its pastoral care, for example by taking pre-emptive action with pupils at risk of exclusion.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good throughout the school. Some teachers do not regularly plan learning that meets the needs of pupils, particularly the most able, who are not challenged enough. Furthermore, these pupils say that they find their work too easy.
- Not all teachers are confident in using questions to check pupils' understanding or in making quick adaptations to their teaching to support pupils' deeper understanding and rapid progress. As a result, some pupils do not understand what they are being asked to do and others find that they are not challenged well enough.
- Where learning is most effective, staff use their understanding of pupils' needs to support those who need more guidance. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, a teaching assistant used very precise questions and prompts to enable a pupil to understand the new ideas. Similarly, the teacher in another mathematics lesson questioned selected pupils to uncover their reasoning, asking them to demonstrate their working out. As a result, the teacher addressed pupils' misconceptions quickly and consolidated their skills.
- The school's assessment policy aims to improve the quality of guidance that pupils receive about improving their work. However, the policy is not yet embedded or used consistently by teachers. Remarks seen in books were often not specific enough to guide pupils in their next steps of learning. Pupils speak of their commitment to making progress and crave developmental challenges from their teachers. Where detailed guidance is seen in books, the pupils' responses show the most progress. However, pupils at present are not clear about how to make progress quickly.
- The most and least able readers have a positive attitude to reading and see it as a key skill 'for when you become an adult'. However, weaker readers in Years 3 and 4 do not recognise words or make links between sounds and letters as well as is expected by pupils of their age. Reading records show slow progress in reading since September. The most able pupils read fluently but say that the texts that they are given are too easy. In daily reading comprehension lessons, pupils are not questioned or challenged sufficiently. Consequently, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good
- Staff apply the behaviour policy consistently. As a result, pupils' attitudes to their learning are good. Pupils usually concentrate on their tasks in class. In some lessons pupils display the self-confidence to help their partners, for example to search dictionaries to improve their understanding of new words.
- Pupils are impressively courteous to visitors and are respectful of each other around the school. They told inspectors that they value the fact that they are trusted to use the supervised, cosy and colourful library at break and lunchtimes.
- The pupil senate participates in school improvement because it provides a forum that pupils use confidently for their ideas and contributions. The senate has been instrumental in recommending the clubs and educational visits that pupils would like to see in the school.
- Pupils welcome the opportunity for training to become pupil librarians.
- Pupils report that they feel safe and secure in the school and have a clear understanding of who to turn to if they are in need of help. Pupils are unanimous that school staff would deal effectively with any incidents of bullying.
- Pupils' understanding of staying safe online is good. The school's e-safety modules are taught to all classes and learning is reinforced by visiting speakers, for example in assemblies.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils believe that their conduct and self-discipline is a positive feature of their school, with 'most pupils are really good' being a typical response. Inspectors' own observations endorse the fact that in lessons, on the playground and around the school, the pupils conduct themselves well.
- The new behaviour management system has made a strong impact. Pupils and staff have a common understanding of the academy-wide system. It is used consistently well to reward positive behaviour and ensures that disruption in lessons is rare.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are positive, and this helps to ensure that lessons are calm and start promptly.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors are positive about the way that school staff deal with, and keep them informed of, any behaviour successes or concerns quickly.
- Levels of attendance have improved strongly and rates of persistent absence diminished since 2015 because school leaders made this a priority. Leaders ensure that all absences are followed up rigorously, for example with phone calls and checks. Visits are made by staff to check up on the safety and welfare of pupils who are frequently absent. Rewards and celebration of good attendance helps to make sure that attendance is now approaching national expectations.
- Punctuality is monitored scrupulously and any time missed at the start of the day is

made up at lunchtime. Staff follow up repeated tardiness well, for example with phone calls home. Inspection evidence also confirms that pupils are very keen to get to school on time, to start learning and to avoid any sanctions for being late.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over time, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning have hampered pupils' achievement across the school and in different subjects, most notably in reading. The progress that pupils make, given their different starting points, requires improvement.
- In 2015 pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, did not meet the national standards for expected progress in English or mathematics.
- Current information for those pupils leaving Year 6 in 2016, although not finalised yet, indicates that the proportion of pupils who attained the new expected standard in reading was well below the national expectation. Proportions of pupils who attained the expected standard in writing and mathematics were better than for reading, but still not consistent with good performance.
- Too few of the most able pupils, with higher prior attainment, attained better than expected scores at the end of Year 6. The school's own records also show that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities did not make sufficient progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as other pupils nationally from similar starting points. With the exception of writing, the difference between the outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and all other pupils nationally did not diminish in 2015. The school has not published its strategy for using the pupil premium this year.
- The most able pupils currently on roll are attaining at expected levels but there is no evidence yet of mastery of the curriculum, learning in greater depth or progress that is better than expected. Although there are plans to train staff to plan higher-order challenges for this group, currently pupils are not achieving as well as they could.
- Leaders acknowledge that their predictions for pupils' achievement were inaccurate as a result of inaccurate assessments in the past. There is a renewed focus this term for staff training in making accurate assessments.
- Leaders are now monitoring pupils' progress in reading more frequently. However, this work is still in its early stages, and pupils have much to catch up before their attainment is in line with national expectations.
- Although the school's own records show that progress is beginning to improve in writing and mathematics, particularly for pupils for whom English is an additional language, work in books is still variable and it is too early to see the impact of leaders' strategies.

School details

Unique reference number	138419
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10011865

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	195
Appropriate authority	Academy Transformation Trust
Chair	Joyce Hodgetts
Principal	Karen Hammond
Telephone number	01842 752387
Website	www.diamond.atrust.org.uk
Email address	office@diamond.atrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 May 2014

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the pupil premium strategy for the current academic year.
- The school does not comply with the Department for Education's guidance on what academies should publish on their website about their annual report and annual accounts, or the publication of information about the pupil premium strategy for the current academic year.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has had two changes of headteacher. The executive principal took up the post in September 2016 while continuing to lead Ravens Academy.
- The school is part of a multi-academy trust, the Academy Transformation Trust.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and an increasing proportion are

from minority ethnic groups of other White heritage. The proportion of those for whom English is an additional language is above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium grant is well above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The school did not meet the current government floor target in 2015, the latest year for which information is published. These express the minimum expectations for what pupils should achieve by the end of their time in the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils learning in lessons and visited smaller groups of pupils in additional sessions. In all lessons, they looked at pupils' books in order to evaluate the quality of learning over time.
- Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of pupils' work for a range of national curriculum subjects.
- Inspectors met pupils in formal meetings as well as informal settings.
- Inspectors met with two governors and held a meeting with representatives from the Academy Transformation Trust.
- Inspectors considered the 11 responses to the online Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke with parents at the start of the school day.
- No responses were received to pupil or staff questionnaires. Inspectors considered the school's own pupil survey responses and the views of staff expressed in several meetings.
- Inspectors reviewed records provided by the school, including information about pupils' progress, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and documents relating to behaviour, attendance and the arrangements to safeguard pupils.

Inspection team

Patricia MacLachlan, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Cloke	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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