

Wrenn School

London Road, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire NN8 2DQ

Inspection dates

18–19 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
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	Inadequate
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders and managers have an overgenerous view of pupils' achievement. Their plan to improve pupils' progress is weak.
- The school's tracking systems are not fit for purpose. Leaders' ability to analyse information about pupils' behaviour and progress is compromised.
- The most able pupils are not consistently challenged in lessons to achieve their best. Too few of them have achieved the high standards they should. Teachers are sometimes unclear as to what these pupils can and should achieve. Pupils' targets are too low.
- Leaders do not have a clear idea as to the effectiveness of pupil premium and catch-up spending. It is not monitored well by governors and the trust.
- There are too few vocational courses on offer post-16. Too few students complete the two-year academic course.
- Pupils' achievement across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics, while improving, is too low. Disadvantaged pupils, the most able and boys consistently do not make the progress they should.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the whole-school assessment system is variable, as is the accuracy of their assessments.
- Teachers do not consistently use the information about pupils' skills, knowledge and ability well to plan for effective learning, especially for the most able. Homework is not consistently set or marked according to the school's policy.
- Too many pupils, especially boys, do not present their work neatly or with pride.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are absent from school and involved in behaviour incidents is too high.
- The trust has not provided effective support for the leaders and governors. It does not monitor government spending well.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils have good relationships with their peers and adults in the classroom. They are well-mannered and smartly presented.
- The principal and governors have made astute staffing decisions. New middle and senior leaders are proving effective.
- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding is developed well. They are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language and newcomers to the school settle well and make good progress.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness provides a thorough and accurate view of the school's position and that the plans to improve the school adequately address the progress of key pupil groups, such as disadvantaged pupils, the most able and boys
 - improving the school's tracking systems to monitor pupils' progress and behaviour so that they are fit for purpose
 - raising the expectation across the school of what the most able pupils should achieve
 - ensuring that an evaluation of the pupil premium and catch-up spending is conducted thoroughly, in a timely manner and published for parents
 - improving the curriculum offer post-16 further, especially in relation to vocational subjects, and increasing the proportion of pupils who stay on for the full two years of an academic course
 - improving the accuracy of teachers' assessment of pupils' work further by learning from best practice in other schools
 - ensuring that the trust provides strong and effective support for leaders and governors (the Academy Advisory Board) and can demonstrate value for money.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and its impact on pupils' progress across the school by:
 - building on the recent improvements in English, mathematics, science, humanities and languages teaching
 - ensuring that teachers use information about pupils' progress more effectively to plan successful learning opportunities for all groups of pupils
 - raising expectations of what pupils can and should achieve, particularly the most able
 - setting homework to move learning on more effectively
 - ensuring that the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and boys in lessons is as high as it should be.

- Improve the behaviour of pupils by ensuring that:
 - pupils’ workbooks are kept to a high standard and pupils show pride in their work
 - the initiatives to improve disadvantaged pupils’ behaviour, including attendance, are embedded and effective.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not yet secured good achievement across the school and in a range of subjects. Too many groups, such as the most able, the disadvantaged (including the most able) and boys are still underachieving, despite recent improvements in their progress.
- Leaders have not been supported well by external advisers. As a consequence, leaders have an over generous view of the school and they have not devised robust enough plans for school improvement. The Education Fellowship Trust fully acknowledges that the support it has provided for the school has not been adequate. It does not monitor the school's work well enough. It is unclear how it has provided value for money for the school.
- The use of the pupil premium and catch-up funding has not been fully evaluated. Parents still do not know how effectively this public money has been spent for 2015/16. The new 'pupil premium champion', appointed in September, has put together promising initiatives to boost the achievement of the disadvantaged pupils, although it is too early to measure the impact. Leaders and governors have been slow to act on all recommendations from the recent pupil premium review.
- Inspectors uncovered some serious flaws in the school's tracking systems which are designed to monitor pupils' progress and generate targets for pupils. The targets pupils and teachers use to measure pupils' progress are too low. Both teachers and pupils are confused by the information provided about pupils' expected progress.
- Leaders do not use management information systems well enough to track pupils' behaviour, although overall figures show behaviour is improving across the school compared with last year. Leaders do not routinely track trends of improvement or decline for particular groups of pupils over time. This compromises their ability to make strategic decisions about school improvement.
- New middle and senior leaders are making a difference to the school. Subject leaders are monitoring the quality of teaching and have developed teaching in their departments well. The school has developed a coherent system to develop teaching practice. The new coaching model is proving effective.
- Pastoral leaders are increasing their effectiveness in providing targeted support for underperforming pupils. They are knowledgeable and skilled. Many disadvantaged pupils have benefited from leaders' closer monitoring and more productive links with families. Both absence and attendance figures have improved over the last year.
- The school's support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is more effective than in previous years. Teaching assistants are trained to support their needs. The progress these pupils make is accelerating, although leaders acknowledge that there is more work to be done to enable them to make the progress they should from their different starting points.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Leaders have conducted a review of the options available to pupils and have increased the vocational range of subjects at key stage 4. Not all of these subjects are available at the next level at key stage 5. The range of enrichment activities are wide-ranging. All faculties hold at least one after-school club for pupils, which are valued and well attended by pupils.
- The curriculum is being further developed this year to boost the interests and aspirations of the most able pupils and boys. A new able and gifted champion was appointed in September. Debating clubs and visits to universities are planned for this year. The leaders of boys' achievement track the achievement of targeted boys. These leaders have influenced the curriculum, such as changing the texts pupils read in English and altering the teaching strategies in mathematics lessons to appeal to the interests of boys. Early signs suggest that these initiatives are making a difference to pupils' achievement.
- Pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of social, moral, cultural and spiritual matters. The curriculum reinforces this understanding well in tutor time, religious education lessons, assemblies and the range of trips available. Pupils are very accepting of others who are different from themselves. Newcomers to the school from other countries are welcomed and accepted well. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- The school's 'scholastic' programme is increasing many pupils' interests and skills in reading across the school. The number of books borrowed from the library has dramatically risen. The most able pupils talk enthusiastically about the authors they have read. Leaders acknowledge that the suitability of books for some low-ability readers needs to be monitored more closely.
- The impartial careers, information, advice and guidance programme is well thought out and relevant. Leaders have provided a wide range of stimuli to help pupils make informed choices. These include a range of inspirational speakers in assemblies from different areas of employment. All pupils who leave the school go on to education, employment or training, including children who are looked after.
- The school's provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is effective. These pupils settle in well and are supported. The 'hub' provides a warm and welcoming environment, especially for pupils new to the country. These pupils make good progress.
- The principal and governors have made astute staffing decisions. They have largely overcome the recruitment challenges they have faced, especially in English, mathematics and humanities subjects. New leaders are contributing well to the school's aims and ethos of good behaviour and high achievement through their messages and through their improvement work.

Governance

- The local governing body, known as the Academy Advisory Board (AAB), provides appropriate challenge to school leaders.
- The chair of the governing body is knowledgeable and skilled. He has instigated important changes to the governing structure to ensure that governors' skills are deployed more effectively to hold leaders to account.
- Governors ask challenging questions of leaders. For example, they have insisted that more steps are taken to validate teachers' assessments of pupils' work. This has proved effective as these assessments are now more accurate as a result.
- Monitoring activities by governors are largely effective, although the chair of the governing body acknowledges that their oversight of pupil premium and catch-up funding has not been rigorous enough recently. Governors acknowledge that publicity messages on the school's website about pupils' achievement are misleading. The website does not comply with the Department for Education guidance.
- The governors have not been supported well by the trust, which has overall responsibility for school finances. The trust's record of attendance at governors' meetings has been sporadic and infrequent. The trust knows too little about the effectiveness of the school.
- The performance management of staff, including the principal, is consistent and complies well with school policy. Governors have rightly checked that the principal has been strict about applying the criteria for teachers to ascend the pay threshold.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The designated safeguarding leaders and the pastoral teams have been effective in protecting vulnerable pupils in the school. They have sound plans to enlist early help. Concerns raised to them are escalated promptly and appropriately to the relevant safeguarding professionals.
- Staff are suitably trained to understand the signs and symptoms of abuse. Adults are vigilant and report concerns using the correct procedures. The whistle-blowing policy and procedures have been used successfully, demonstrating the school's strong and effective safeguarding culture.
- The curriculum supports the culture and ethos of safeguarding. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, are regularly taught how to identify possible risks and given strategies to avoid risky behaviours. Online safety is taught well. All pupils who spoke with inspectors about this aspect said they understood the risks of using the internet and how to avoid them. They feel safe in the school.
- Key members of staff have undertaken Channel Awareness training to support the prevention of radicalisation and extremism. Staff are alert to these risks, know how to refer concerns and understand the local threats.
- The AAB monitors the school's safeguarding policies and procedures well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers have access to a wide range of assessment information about individual pupils. Not all teachers use this information well to plan their lessons. In a good proportion of lessons, teaching does not meet the needs of particular groups, such as the most able or boys. These pupils make inconsistent progress across a range of subjects as a result.
- While the quality of teaching is improving across the school, there are pockets of inconsistency, especially in science, humanities and design and technology. The greatest consistency in teaching quality is in English and mathematics. The school's 'passport to success', a booklet in which pupils record their progress towards learning goals in each subject, is contributing well to pupils' understanding of what they should know and understand. In English and mathematics, where this system has been in existence for longer, teachers have noted demonstrable improvements in pupils' progress.
- A new system to set and monitor homework has been introduced by leaders. However, pupils say, and some parents agree, that homework is not always set regularly, or marked by teachers in line with the school's policy.
- The most able pupils are not consistently challenged to achieve their best. Some teachers demonstrate confusion about what targets these pupils should achieve under the new national assessment system at key stage 4. In some lessons, these pupils still have to wait for others to catch up before they can move their learning on. In the more successful lessons, teachers identify and target these pupils with work that challenges their thinking and sharpens their skills.
- While inspectors witnessed very little disruption to lessons, they did observe some pupils lose interest and focus because the work they were set was either too difficult or uninteresting. This was particularly true of boys.
- Most teachers create a conducive learning atmosphere in the classroom. There is a high degree of respect shown between pupils and between adults and pupils. Pupils feel safe to ask questions and they seek help when they need it. This is a consistent strength in teaching across the school.
- Teachers have developed their marking and feedback skills. Pupils mostly act on the teachers' suggestions for improvement. Teachers' push on strong literacy skills has made a difference in a range of subjects other than English, such as science, humanities and design and technology.
- Teaching assistants work well with class teachers and support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively. Additional lessons to support those who need to catch up, especially in English and mathematics, are improving pupils' attainment, especially in Years 7 and 8.
- Teachers have been trained well to support pupils who speak English as an additional language. These pupils are placed in appropriate sets according to their aptitude and not their language acquisition. As a result, they learn quickly and make good progress. They told inspectors that they feel supported and happy.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have a strong sense of social and moral duty as a result of the school's work to develop their social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. They are very accepting of pupils from other backgrounds and faiths. Many have the confidence to stand up for minority groups, including gay and bisexual people and minority ethnic groups. There are few bullying incidents and any racist incidents are dealt with firmly by teachers. As a result, these incidents are rarely repeated.
- Pupils are provided with good guidance to support their mental health and the challenges which may face them as they grow up. They demonstrate good knowledge and understanding about online safety and the dangers of 'sexting'.
- Newcomers to the school from other countries are accepted well. Pupils have a strong sense of empathy towards, and understanding of, others less fortunate than themselves. The personal, social and health curriculum develops pupils' understanding of the current refugee crisis. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Parents overwhelmingly agree that their sons and daughters are supported well, safe and helped to make progress by the adults in the school. Pupils spoken with say they are 'proud to be Wrenn'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- While the overall absence and exclusion rates show a decline since the last inspection, disadvantaged pupils are still over-represented in these figures. This vulnerable group is also underachieving academically. Leaders recognise that this issue is a priority for their improvement planning. New initiatives introduced by leaders to support this group of pupils are yet to be embedded across the school.
- A high proportion of pupils were involved in behaviour incidents and referred to the internal exclusion unit last year. The inconsistent and mostly weak management of this area, as witnessed by inspectors, may account for the incidence of repeat behaviour by some pupils.
- Too many pupils, principally boys, show a lack of pride in their work, mostly handing in work that is unfinished and messy. Boys' achievement across the school still lags behind girls'.
- Most pupils are very presentable and abide by the school uniform rules. The majority of pupils cooperate with one another well and relationships between boys and girls and different ethnic groups are mostly harmonious.
- Pupils are respectful of their environment. There is very little litter or graffiti around the school.
- Pupils in the alternative off-site provision make good progress, attend and behave well.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- The school did not meet the government's floor standards in 2014 and 2015, and the provisional pupils' performance information for 2016 suggests that the school's overall progress is below average. While this represents a marginal improvement, too many pupils have been failed by the school in previous years. Pupils who should have achieved good passes in English and mathematics did not, and therefore were not prepared well for the next stage of their education.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able, did not make the progress they should or reach the standards expected. While these pupils progressed onto courses at post-16, their options would have been limited as many did not achieve the entry requirements to undertake A levels. Recent work to target disadvantaged pupils' progress is resulting in signs of early success.
- The difference between the boys' attainment and that of girls across many subjects, including English and mathematics, is wide. A recent focus on boys' achievement led by the recently appointed 'boys' champion' is starting to improve boys' engagement and achievement, especially in the lower years.
- In 2015, pupils with high prior attainment did not make the progress they should, especially in English and mathematics. A whole-school focus to accelerate this group's progress is starting to make a difference. The most able pupils in the current Year 8 are making the progress they should in a range of subjects.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. They are supported well by a skilled team of teaching assistants, who work closely with teachers.
- Pupils who have found it difficult to keep up with their peers have historically not made the progress they should quickly enough. Targeted support recently, in mathematics and English across the school, including in reading, is accelerating their progress.
- Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often. Regular reading during lesson times is reinforcing pupils' reading skills and love of reading. Recent assessments of pupils' reading and comprehension skills are showing that this strategy is working. The most able pupils are now reading a wide range of literary works for pleasure, strongly encouraged by teachers.
- Pupils are well informed about their education and employment options. The programme of advice and guidance is well thought out and wide-ranging. Although pupils' choices post-16 were disadvantaged by their poor academic achievement in recent years, current pupils are set to undertake courses well suited to their ability and aspirations. Pupils say they value the advice they are given.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Students' progress on academic subjects in recent years has been variable, especially at A2 level. Although statistically, the grades students achieve have compared favourably with national averages, the progress many made in relation to their starting points was not as high as expected.

- Too many students do not complete their two-year academic course. However, all students go on to other post-16 provision, gain employment or change courses at the end of Year 12. Sixth-form leaders acknowledge that these students' decisions to a large extent reflected the quality of teaching and achievement in certain subjects. These concerns have mostly been addressed this year through curriculum changes and teaching improvements. This is particularly true in law, sociology and economics.
- The progression route for applied or vocational courses at key stage 4 into key stage 5 in the school is limited. This has reduced the choices for those wishing to undertake more work-related studying. The relatively small number who stay on into the sixth form from key stage 4 is one consequence of the narrow course choice.
- Students who retake English and mathematics at GCSE in the sixth form are very successful. All achieve at least one grade higher than they did at key stage 4.
- The gap between disadvantaged students' attainment and that of their peers is narrow. A large proportion of disadvantaged students go on to take up university places, just like their peers. Last year all students who applied to university got into their first or second choices.
- A higher proportion of students than ever before have gained places at prestigious universities in 2016.
- The post-16 leaders monitor the progress of students rigorously. These leaders also monitor the quality of teaching and enlist support quickly when teaching does not meet the expected standard.
- Students speak highly of the pastoral programme. They are given help, advice and guidance to help them reduce the risks to their safety, such as through the use of the internet and social media. They feel safe and behave appropriately, and they contribute to the school well. Some act as mentors for pupils in the main school.
- The sixth form met the government's interim minimum standards in 2015.

School details

Unique reference number	139961
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10012835

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,109
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	173
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bill Mandeville
Principal	Steve Elliott
Telephone number	01933 222 039
Website	www.wrenn-academy.net
Email address	info@wrenn-academy.net
Date of previous inspection	12–13 June 2015

Information about this school

- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the pupil premium spending, catch-up funding and key stage 4 progress.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about pupil premium and catch-up funding on its website.
- Wrenn School joined the Education Fellowship Trust (TEF) in September 2013, when it converted to academy status. The academy is based on two sites: Year 7 and 8 and the sixth form on one site, and Years 9, 10 and 11 on the other.

- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. Around 40% are from minority ethnic groups. There are around 42 nationalities among the pupils on roll.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is higher than the national average.
- Nearly one fifth of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. This is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. The proportion with an education, health and care plan is slightly above the national average.
- A very small number of pupils attend alternative provision on a part-time basis at Complementary Education, a well-used organisation.
- In 2015, the school did not meet the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that serious allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the allegations were considered (where appropriate) alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.
- Inspectors observed over 36 parts of lessons across all year groups and the vast majority of subjects. For many of these, senior leaders jointly observed teaching with inspectors. Tutor time and assemblies were also observed. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the leader for English as an additional language, behaviour leaders, leaders of the sixth form, subject leaders, the chair of the governing body and three members of the TEF, including the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors evaluated a range of school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, pupils' behaviour and progress information, leaders' monitoring and safeguarding records, and governors' minutes of meetings.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils across all year groups.
- Inspectors took account of 209 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 47 responses using the free-text facility. Inspectors also evaluated 75 responses to the staff survey. The school's own surveys were also evaluated.

Inspection team

Zarina Connolly, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sally Wicken	Ofsted Inspector
Phil Drabble	Ofsted Inspector
Lynn Lowery	Ofsted Inspector
Nigel Boyd	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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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