

John Mason School

Wootton Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1JB

Inspection dates

31 January–1 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teaching is not yet consistently good or better. Teachers' planning does not always take account of what pupils already know, understand and can do.
- Staff's expectations in some subject areas are currently too low. As a result, some subject teams do not stretch and challenge the most able pupils sufficiently.
- Senior leaders are supporting middle leaders in how they use information to track and monitor progress and behaviour. This is not yet embedded and, as a result, some middle leaders are not supporting pupils' progress as well as they could be.
- Pupils attain GCSE results above national averages at the end of key stage 4. However, the progress that pupils make from their different starting points is not consistently good across different subjects.
- Pupils make less progress in science and humanities than in other subjects such as German and mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are nurtured and supported well. However, teachers do not focus enough on their academic progress and the impact of actions to improve outcomes.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are passionate about improving their school. Their evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is accurate. Their clear plans and actions to develop the school are beginning to improve pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders' effective strategies have improved the culture and ethos of the school. As a result, the school is calm and orderly and behaviour is typically very good.
- The safeguarding of pupils is effective.
- Pupils experience a broad curriculum. It is enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities that are well attended by pupils.
- Sixth form students are supported well across the consortium of schools. Students follow a suitable 16–19 programme.
- Newly appointed subject leaders are improving the quality of teaching in their subject areas by raising expectations and sharing good practice. This is particularly notable in English and mathematics.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good, so that:
 - teachers plan effectively for the different abilities of the pupils in their classes
 - disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress in line with national averages for other pupils
 - all teachers have consistently high expectations which stretch and challenge the most able, including the most able disadvantaged
 - the quality of the curriculum and teaching in science and humanities improves to match standards in other subjects.
- Ensure that middle leaders use assessment information consistently effectively to identify and support pupils who are at risk of falling behind.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and how it supports the local community. After a period of great turbulence, a newly established senior leadership team is now in place. Senior leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses and are taking effective action to improve pupils' outcomes.
- The headteacher is highly visible and pupils are pleased that she knows them by name. Parents are very complimentary about her drive and passion for the school. Parents and pupils recognise that the headteacher is raising pupils' aspirations, tackling poor teaching and instilling a culture of achievement.
- Parents, staff and pupils rightly have confidence in the good leadership provided by the headteacher. The vast majority of parents would recommend this school to other parents and believe their children are well looked after.
- Leaders have established a culture and ethos built on mutual respect and equality of opportunity. To support this vision, leaders have implemented a new behaviour for learning policy. This is applied consistently across subjects and year groups, and, as a result, behaviour has improved significantly. This is encouraging stronger working relationships between staff and pupils because more time is spent learning in lessons.
- Leaders have adjusted the curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 so it now meets pupils' needs well. Across key stage 3, pupils' literacy levels have improved as a result of leaders' focus on improving reading. At key stage 4, the curriculum now includes a good range of pathways for pupils, including GCSEs and vocational qualifications. A few pupils follow a specialist course which is helping them to understand more about themselves and how to modify their behaviour. Overall, these curriculum changes are improving pupils' engagement and attendance.
- Leaders have identified pupils' barriers to learning and have directed staff to work in a variety of ways to support them. This approach is improving these pupils' well-being, attendance and attitudes to learning.
- Pupils' learning is enriched by the large number of extra-curricular activities available to them. Some pupils are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, while others take an active role in school plays, music, sporting teams and/or leadership programmes.
- Leaders responsible for teaching and learning have focused on ensuring that all teachers are aware of pupils' prior performance, targets and particular needs. This helps teachers to plan the appropriate 'steps to success' for pupils in their lessons. As a result, there is stronger challenge for pupils because teachers are proactively planning to stretch and challenge all abilities. This is done particularly effectively in English, German, physical education and art.
- Senior leaders have tackled weaknesses in subject leadership, particularly in English, mathematics and humanities. Leaders in these subjects are now increasingly effective at understanding school performance information, checking the quality of teaching and learning and knowing how to improve pupils' outcomes. As a result, the quality of

teaching is improving in these subjects.

- Pupils have a variety of opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Social education lessons, outside speakers, assemblies and the school's specific 'iDays' ensure that all pupils learn to have a social conscience, be aware of differences within religions and cultures, and have a moral compass.
- Leaders and governors make effective use of pupil premium funding to help disadvantaged pupils. Leaders target their spending on supporting pupils' personal development and welfare and improving their attendance. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils are looked after well and come to school more regularly than in the past.
- Leaders make effective use of other additional funding, including to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the catch-up funding in Year 7. The latter is improving pupils' reading ages and literacy skills, which supports their progress in other subjects. Year 7 pupils who read to inspectors could explain the context and meaning of a piece of text.
- Governors and leaders hold staff to account effectively. Leaders have reinforced with teachers why they need to meet their targets and how these link to pupils' progress and achievement.
- In some year groups, pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour are monitored well. However, this is not consistent across year groups. As a result, some pupils who need support are not always offered appropriate help.
- While the work of the recently established leadership team is making a positive difference, it has not currently led to good teaching and learning throughout the school. As a result, pupils' outcomes are not yet consistently good across subjects and year groups.

Governance of the school

- Governance is good. Governors have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have correctly prioritised key areas for improvement and understand what actions are being taken and how these are adding value. For example, a review of pupil premium funding led governors to improve their plans so that it helps these pupils to achieve better outcomes more effectively.
- In 2015, the governors recognised the need to secure strong leadership in the senior team because pupils' outcomes were too low and there was a high turnover of staff. As a result, governors acted decisively to improve the quality of leadership. Governors strengthened their role in the appointment of new staff in order to secure high quality.
- The chair and members of the governing body work closely with school leaders to monitor the school's work and provide challenge where appropriate. Governors visit the school regularly. They frequently review the actions school leaders take and the impact these have.
- Governors have drawn on the expertise from external agencies and practitioners to support their work. This helps leaders to plan and review how teaching and learning across the school can be enhanced in order to improve pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders and managers responsible for safeguarding carry out their roles well and keep pupils safe. The vast majority of parents believe their child is safe at school.
- Clear and appropriate measures are in place to ensure that leaders check the suitability of staff and keep careful records. Leaders and governors are trained in safer recruitment and involved fully in staff interview processes. All staff receive regular safeguarding updates.
- Leaders work effectively with external agencies to support pupils and their families.
- Pupils feel very safe. They are taught to identify potential dangers and how to avoid them. Staff know their pupils well and follow up any potential issues.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good across subjects and year groups. Pupils are not challenged to work as hard as they can in some lessons and work is often unfinished. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their understanding and are not achieving their potential.
- Teachers' planning does not always account for the pupils' abilities when identifying different pupils' next 'steps to success'. As a result, some pupils repeat topics they have previously understood. This is slowing the progress of the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, in science.
- Leaders ensure that teachers know their pupils' prior ability, targets and individual needs. In some subjects, such as art, German and physical education, teachers use this knowledge to plan learning that makes sure pupils of all abilities are stretched and challenged appropriately. However, this is not used consistently in all teachers' planning.
- Despite leaders' whole-school focus to improve teaching and learning, some teachers do not use questioning consistently well. Some teachers' questions are not challenging enough, especially for the middle-ability and the most able pupils. When this happens, pupils are not sufficiently stretched and challenged.
- In some lessons, pupils are not confident enough to ask for help and support. Consequently, valuable learning time is lost and pupils make limited progress.
- More effective leadership is improving the quality of teaching in English, mathematics and humanities. Teachers use the school's assessment policy effectively to review pupils' work and check their understanding before they move on to the next topic. This approach is helping pupils identify how to improve their work and is consolidating their understanding.
- Current disadvantaged pupils make similar progress to others in their classes. Leaders ensure that teachers keep a careful eye on this group of pupils, to check their understanding of specific topics. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are more actively

involved in their learning.

- Since September 2015, a small group of pupils follow alternative vocational courses at local 14–19 providers. This group have secured apprenticeships and higher level courses to extend their knowledge in, for example, hair and beauty, and construction, which is securing their future careers.
- Pupils in Year 7 currently follow a condensed key stage 3 curriculum which builds on the key stage 2 programmes of study and is structured to provide more challenge. This is helping pupils to make more rapid progress than they have in the past.
- Pupils' literacy has improved significantly in the last two years as a result of the whole-school focus on reading. The tutor programme 'drop everything and read' has helped pupils re-engage with reading. As a result, pupils are able to read and interpret texts in lessons more effectively.
- Through social education and religious education lessons, pupils develop an understanding of different religions, race, culture and societies. They learn about British democracy, justice, a need for tolerance and respect in our society.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils engage well with the taught programme of personal development and respect the rights of others.
- Pupils feel very well supported by their pastoral support teams. Pupils are taught how to stay safe and they know how to avoid potential dangers when using social media. They understand the risks associated with drugs and alcohol. Pupils know who to report concerns to should any arise.
- Pupils are happy at school and proud to be members of its community. They recognise that the headteacher and her team are working hard to improve their school further. As a result, pupils feel they are all treated equally.
- Pupils are respectful of one another and celebrate differences. Stereotyping, which is rare, is quickly challenged by both staff and pupils to create an inclusive school.
- Leaders provide useful support for pupils who have low self-esteem and confidence. In assemblies, pupils reflect on how to improve their self-confidence and self-esteem. In Year 8, all pupils go on a residential trip to develop their leadership abilities, recognising how and when to take calculated risks, challenge themselves and work as a team. Pupils enjoy this residential trip because it helps them to believe in themselves and improve their confidence.
- Through social education lessons, pupils learn and reflect about the bigger social issues facing our world, such as the refugee crisis, poverty and climate change, effectively.
- Pupils learn about democracy and the rule of law. They understand how and why decisions are made which govern modern Britain and learn how to be responsible citizens.

- Pupils develop leadership through sports leadership programmes and through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award schemes. Many key stage 4 pupils run and support extra-curricular activities for younger pupils.
- Pupils appreciate the impartial careers guidance they receive. All pupils in Year 10 follow work experience programmes. This support and guidance is helping to secure pupils' next steps in their education, employment and training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This includes those attending the school's inclusion centre, Abingdon and Witney College and those supported by the Meadow Brook Centre.
- Pupils display positive attitudes to learning and come to school prepared to learn. They take pride in their work.
- The new behaviour system implemented by leaders is having a positive impact. Incidents of poor behaviour in the classroom have declined. This is reinforcing the school's positive culture and ethos for learning.
- The attendance of pupils is approximately in line with national averages. However, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have historically had poor attendance. Leaders have implemented new systems this academic year which are helping to improve attendance for these vulnerable groups. Persistent absence is also reducing.
- Leaders have appointed an inclusion centre manager and support workers to work with pupils who have social, emotional, behavioural and/or attendance problems. This team create individual support packages that help small groups of pupils participate fully in school life, improve their attendance, manage their behaviour and improve their self-esteem. This is reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions by supporting pupils through difficult times in their lives.
- Alternative programmes of study at key stage 4 are improving some pupils' attitudes to learning. They are also helping these pupils to interact better with those around them.
- The school monitors the attendance and progress of pupils taught off-site to ensure that they are being well cared for and are engaged in their learning. These pupils attend regularly and make good progress. As a result, pupils following alternative courses are on target to achieve their vocational qualifications.
- Pupils behave well both in lessons and around the school site. They listen politely to others and encourage one another to do well.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' attainment on entry is above the national average. At the end of 2016, Year 11 pupils' attainment was above the national average overall. However, middle-ability and the most able pupils are not making the progress they should and their outcomes are below national averages.
- Pupils, including the disadvantaged, do not currently make enough progress in science.

The curriculum is not suitably challenging and planning does not match closely the starting points of different groups of pupils. As a result, pupils' progress is slow in this subject.

- There are a range of programmes in place to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many of these actions support pupils' personal development and are highly effective. However, the leader responsible for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities does not always use the information provided by leaders to track progress closely. Consequently, some pupils do not make enough progress by the end of each key stage.
- Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, did not perform as well as other pupils in 2016. Leaders have introduced a school 'pledge' which encourages teachers to maintain a focus on this group of pupils. This is helping to raise the profile of this group of pupils and improve their current progress.
- In 2016, pupils achieved particularly well in GCSE art, drama, modern foreign languages and physical education by the end of Year 11. Outcomes in history and geography were less strong. The humanities subject leader has accelerated the pace of change, and current pupils' outcomes in these two subjects are improving.
- In 2016, the attainment of pupils in English, irrespective of their prior ability, was below national expectations. However, the teaching of English has much improved. Teachers plan lessons that stretch and challenge pupils effectively and strategies to help pupils improve their work are used well. As a result, pupils' outcomes are improving significantly in this subject.
- Attainment in mathematics in 2016 was above the national average. Leaders recognise that more can be done to support the progress of middle-ability learners and improve the outcomes of this group. As a result, leaders responsible for mathematics are targeting intervention to support pupils' progress and outcomes are improving across all year groups.
- There is a growing culture of reading in the school. All pupils read in tutor periods and key stage 3 pupils also follow a programme to support reading. This is improving pupils' literacy and communication skills as well as improving outcomes in English and humanities.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The 16 to 19 programmes of study are good. Students are offered a range of A-level subjects across a consortium of three schools. Students use their non-contact time to contribute to the school community and broaden their knowledge and understanding.
- Some teaching is very effective, with high levels of challenge, expert questioning and planning that stretches students. This is particularly evident in art lessons.
- In 2016, students made progress that was in line with or better than national averages in most subjects. Students currently in the sixth form are making similar progress.
- Impartial careers advice and guidance are helping students to focus on their next steps effectively. Most students enter university once they finish their courses and this number has increased in the last two years. Students also consider apprenticeships and

possible work opportunities. The number of students who do not remain in education, employment or training is reducing.

- From September 2017, students will be able to choose from a variety of vocational courses, as well as A levels from the consortium. This will broaden the range of study programmes available to students and expand their career opportunities.
- Students who need to resit their GCSE English and/or mathematics examinations, follow study programmes across the consortium. As a result, the majority make progress and improve their grades in English and/or mathematics.
- Students feel safe, are well supported and confident they are making progress towards their targets.
- The sixth form leaders meet fortnightly with other consortium leaders to monitor students' personal development, attendance and progress. The deputy headteacher currently works closely with the sixth form leader to track students' progress at school. This ensures that students meet their target grades in their chosen subjects.

School details

Unique reference number	140580
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10024550

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	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	956
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	112
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mr Jonathan Hopkins
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Brinkley
Telephone number	01235 524664
Website	www.johnmason.oxon.sch.uk
Email address	office.4126@johnmason.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The academy is an 11–18 comprehensive school which is average in size. The school is growing, and applications are rising across all year groups including the sixth form.
- The school gained academy status in February 2014.
- Since August 2015, there have been many changes to the school's staffing. The headteacher took up her position in September 2015. A number of senior leaders, middle leaders and other staff left or joined the school during 2015/16.
- The proportion of pupils on roll who are disadvantaged is below the national average.

- The number of pupils on roll who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- A small number of pupils attend part-time vocational courses at Abingdon and Witney College.
- A few pupils attend sessions at Meadowbrook Centre, a pupil referral unit, to support them with their emotional and behavioural needs.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection started as a section 8 short inspection and converted to a full section 5 inspection.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 47 lessons across a range of subjects and year groups. Eighteen of these lessons were joint lesson observations with the school's leadership team.
- Inspectors visited tutor groups and observed an assembly.
- Inspectors met with pupils from all year groups in meetings, in lessons and informally around the school. They also listened to a group of Year 7 pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' written work across a range of abilities, subjects and year groups.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, and newly qualified teachers. They also met with the chair and vice-chair of governors, as well as other representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors considered the school's policies, including those for: safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, pupil premium and special educational needs. They reviewed the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan. They also looked at records relating to current pupils' progress and attendance, as well as behaviour and exclusion logs.
- Inspectors reviewed 201 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 80 responses from parents on Ofsted's free text service.

Inspection team

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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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