

Ixworth Free School

Walsham Road, Ixworth, Suffolk, IP31 2HS

Inspection dates

20–21 June 2017

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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders, including the trustees, have not ensured that pupils make good progress.
- The quality of teaching varies too widely. Expectations of pupils are not always high enough. Some tasks are not sufficiently challenging, particularly for more-able pupils.
- Teachers do not make regular checks in lessons, so pupils' work is often poorly presented or left incomplete.
- Marking procedures are not applied consistently. Basic errors in spelling and grammar are not always corrected.
- Teaching that fails to engage pupils leads to some low-level disruption in lessons.
- Assessment procedures do not provide a clear overview of how well all pupils are progressing.
- Targets are not set for the most able pupils attaining the highest grades.
- Too many pupils are persistently absent. Some disadvantaged pupils do not attend regularly enough, which limits their progress.
- Leaders do not ensure that all pupils in year 7 catch up by gaining basic literacy skills.
- The key stage 4 curriculum does not meet the needs of all pupils, particularly those who are less able and are not fully suited to the rigours of GCSE studies.
- Self-evaluation is too generous. Improvement plans lack measurable targets to hold staff accountable.
- Trustees do not ensure that additional funding is suitably targeted towards disadvantaged pupils who need it most.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have met their aim of setting up a new school that provides pupils with a rich, stimulating environment in which to learn.
- The school is a safe, friendly and enjoyable place to be. Pupils are polite, respectful and conduct themselves well outside of lessons.
- Teaching in a range of foundation subjects leads to good progress being made.
- Staff foster good relations with pupils.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good.
- A wide range of enrichment activities, including clubs, off-site visits and careers events, are valued highly by pupils.
- Safeguarding arrangements are secure.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Gain greater consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - providing work that is suitably challenging for pupils of all abilities
 - setting clear guidelines for presenting and completing all work in pupils' books, and checking that these procedures are followed systematically
 - monitoring pupils' work during lessons to check that pupils are working hard enough and that the quality and quantity of their work meets leaders' expectations
 - applying the school's procedures for managing pupils' behaviour consistently.
- Raise achievement by:
 - raising expectations of what pupils are capable of attaining throughout the school
 - ensuring that all pupils acquire essential, basic skills in reading, writing, spelling and the use of grammar
 - strengthening assessment procedures so that they illustrate clearly how well all pupils are progressing
 - setting targets for the proportion of the most able pupils achieving the highest GCSE grades
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils attend regularly and receive the support they need to achieve well.
- Raise attendance by:
 - improving the monitoring of pupils' attendance and taking swift action when individual pupils' regular attendance begins to show signs of deteriorating
 - adding further rigour to the monitoring of disadvantaged pupils' attendance
 - implementing more robust procedures to tackle persistent absence.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - using the information gained from a thorough and accurate evaluation of the schools' strengths and weaknesses to inform detailed plans for improvement
 - ensuring that these plans contain measurable targets to hold all leaders and staff accountable for making improvements
 - ensuring that teachers apply the school's procedures for marking pupils' work and providing them with regular advice about how to improve
 - ensuring that the pupil premium and catch-up funding are targeted towards those who they are intended for, and who need the most support
 - reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it enables all pupils to achieve well enough.

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

- Leaders have established a new school that meets some of the aims of its local community. They have been less effective in attracting and retaining enough pupils to have the resources they need to build capacity and lead further improvement. Furthermore, changes in staffing and difficulties in recruiting new staff have hampered the school's development.
- Leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness as good. Inspection findings do not support this view. The quality of teaching varies too widely, and some of it is not good enough. The inability of leaders to secure good teaching has a detrimental effect on the progress made by pupils, and on the behaviour of a small minority of pupils.
- The headteacher and her senior team are ambitious for the school. They have implemented plans to improve it further but they do not include measurable targets to hold staff accountable for securing improvements.
- Leaders' monitoring of the school's work is too variable. They collate a range of assessment information but this does not illustrate clearly and coherently how well all pupils are progressing over time. Pupils' attendance is monitored but this has not led to marked improvements in reducing persistent absence. Leaders have rightly identified improving attendance as one of the school's top priorities.
- Due to its small size, the school is dependent on the work of the headteacher and her team of senior staff. There are very few middle leaders; teachers are leaders of their subjects. This restricts the school's capacity to secure and sustain improvements in some subjects.
- The curriculum ensures that those suited to GCSE studies follow a wide range of subjects. Provision is enriched by a wide range of after-school clubs in sports and the arts, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and an extra enrichment lesson on Wednesday afternoons. This adds significantly to pupils' enjoyment of school. Pupils spoke enthusiastically with inspectors about the excellent opportunities to visit other countries, and engage in an annual 'activities week'.
- Revised procedures to manage the performance of staff are suitably rigorous. This has ensured that some underperformance has been dealt with, and only those deserving pay awards get them.
- Responses from parents during the inspection confirmed that the majority of them are supportive of leaders and the actions they are taking. However, a significant minority raised concerns about the number of staffing changes since opening, and the impact this is having on the quality of teaching and the behaviour of some pupils in lessons.

Governance of the school

- The school's trustees bring a range of knowledge and experience to the school but they have not provided enough challenge and support for senior leaders to secure long-term, sustainable improvements.
- They evaluate the school's effectiveness as good but this is not the case. They have

not checked that information provided by leaders and outside agencies gives them an accurate overview of the school's effectiveness.

- Until recently, the pupil premium has been used to improve the progress and welfare of all pupils. This approach has not ensured that all disadvantaged pupils achieve well enough, or attend regularly.
- Additional funding has not been used effectively to enable less-able pupils joining in Year 7 to catch up with other pupils. Inspectors found that at this stage of the year, not all of them have secured the necessary reading and writing skills needed for the next stage of their learning.
- The school has a significant minority of less able pupils, and a regular flow of pupils joining key stage 4 at times other than the start of the school year. Trustees are committed to a curriculum based on pupils pursuing a wide range of GCSE subjects. They have not considered fully whether this provision is enabling all pupils to achieve well enough.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All necessary checks are carried out when recruiting adults to work with children.
- Access to the school site is managed effectively.
- Procedures to protect pupils from harm are secure. However, details of all the actions taken by leaders to keep vulnerable pupils safe lack clarity because they are not always recorded systematically.
- Leaders liaise effectively with a range of external agencies to follow up concerns and maintain pupils' safety.
- Safeguarding training for all staff, including on the 'Prevent' duty, is up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching is inconsistent. Some of it is not good enough. The good practice seen by inspectors in some foundation subjects has not been shared across all areas of the curriculum.
- Expectations of what pupils are capable of attaining are too low. Tasks in lessons are often the same for all pupils. Consequently, the most able pupils find them too easy. Pupils' books show that in mathematics in both key stages, some calculations are too basic and do not fully stretch pupils' understanding or application.
- In English and in a range of other subjects, pupils' writing is often minimal and of a very basic standard. Too much of it is untidy and shows a lack of pride because there are no clear rules for presenting their work.
- Teachers use past papers, tests and assignments to make termly assessments of pupils' progress, and identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding. This information is collated centrally by leaders, but it does not provide a clear overview of the progress made by all pupils.

- Not all teachers make regular checks during lessons to gauge whether pupils are working hard, or if the quality of their work is good enough. Casual errors in spelling and the use of grammar are often repeated because teachers do not correct them in their marking. In some practical-based subjects such as food technology, pupils do not have books to record their learning in.
- In most subjects, pupils have targets for attainment on the front of their books, based on GCSE numerical grades. Older pupils feel this is helpful as they are reviewed regularly and helps them to be aspirational and aim high. When asked by inspectors, some younger pupils were unaware of what these numerical grades meant.
- Pupils thrive in lessons involving practical activities. For example, in physical education pupils worked cooperatively in groups to develop their batting and their throwing skills. They used criteria provided by the teacher effectively to improve their own understanding of techniques, and to aid the performance of other pupils. In drama, pupils were taught how to observe and evaluate the performance of others. They provided good-quality advice that helped their classmates to improve their use of voice. Skilful use of time by the teacher enabled pupils to make good progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Much of the school's good work to care for and support pupils' personal development and welfare is undermined by their regular absence. Overall attendance is below average. A minority of disadvantaged pupils are regularly absent from school. The actions taken by leaders to resolve this have, until recently, had little impact. Some actions are not taken early enough at the first signs of absence, so some pupils' absence remains stubbornly low.
- Other than monitoring their attendance, staff provide pupils with good pastoral care. Good food provided at breakfast, breaks and lunchtimes ensures that they are nourished and ready to learn. Pupils feel cared for. They say that there is always someone to talk to who will listen to their concerns.
- Regular tutorials help pupils to review their achievements and consider plans for their future careers. Pupils have personal education plans which are reviewed termly with their tutors to monitor how well they are doing and log their achievements.
- Leaders provide pupils with a rich, stimulating environment in which to learn. Displays in corridors and classrooms remind pupils of the 'six Cs' of cooperation, commitment, confidence, community, challenge and celebration which underpin much of the school's work. Photographs of pupils at work and at play are exceptionally good. Noticeboards are used well to celebrate pupils' achievements and inform pupils of whom to contact if they have concerns regarding their sexual health, their safety and the risks posed by drugs and alcohol, extremism and radicalisation.
- Weekly lessons in personal, social and health education, and philosophy and ethics are used well to prompt pupils' thought and discussion of topical issues. Displays of 'hot

topics', such as the recent elections held in school to promote pupils' understanding of fundamental British values, homosexuality and staying safe online, all contribute towards pupils' wider spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Inspectors noted some poor attitudes towards learning. Where teaching fails to capture and retain pupils' interest, a minority of them lose concentration, and some misbehave. When this happens, not all teachers apply the school's agreed procedures to manage behaviour.
- Pupils feel that school is a safe, friendly place to be. Its small size means that pupils know each other and their staff well. Pupils feel free from bullying. When it does happen, mostly name-calling or being unpleasant towards each other, they can talk to any member of staff, who will help them sort it out.
- Outside of lessons, behaviour is good. The school is calm and purposeful. Most pupils conduct themselves well around school, and during breaks and lunchtimes. They meet and chat in friendship groups, or play games together.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- This is the first year that the school has held external examinations, so it has little information to compare its performance against other schools. A range of interventions this year has helped to boost the learning and progress of pupils in year 11. Leaders feel that well over half of them will attain good outcomes in GCSE English and mathematics, and a range of other subjects this year. A higher than average proportion of them are expected to attain the EBacc qualification. Leaders have not set targets for the proportion of most able pupils attaining the very highest grades.
- Current assessment information indicates a similar pattern of improvement in other year groups. Observing pupils at work in lessons, and scrutinising their work in books does not support leaders' views that pupils make good progress. Currently teaching varies too widely, and this leads to a minority of pupils underachieving in a range of subjects.
- Leaders acknowledge that more needs to be done to ensure that teaching enables all pupils to make sufficient progress and achieve well. Furthermore, they recognise that a significant proportion of pupils do not make sufficient progress because they do not turn up for school often enough.
- A minority of pupils in key stage 3 lack basic literacy skills. Their handwriting, spelling and use of basic grammar, especially capital letters, commas and full stops, are underdeveloped. A few who read aloud to inspectors were unable to read fluently or confidently. This presents a significant barrier to their future learning and progress.
- The school's assessment procedures measure the progress made from term to term. Assessments for this term take place next week, so the full picture of pupils' progress over the year remains unclear.

- Current assessment data shows that in general, gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school, and compared to others nationally, are narrowing. However, pupil premium funding is spread too thinly. It is not targeted towards those it is designed for. Some support is offered to disadvantaged pupils, even though they do not need it. Most-able disadvantaged pupils appear to be making similar progress to other pupils, other than in Year 11, where actions to help pupils overcome barriers to their achievement have had limited impact.
- The school does not receive additional funding to provide support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, as none of them have a statement or an education, health and care plan. However, inspectors found that not enough is done to support all of these, and other less-able, pupils in lessons because there are too few support assistants available.
- Almost all pupils in year 11 have clear destinations arranged for the next stage of their education. The large majority of them have placements in local schools and colleges to pursue level 2 and level 3 courses.

School details

Unique reference number	140047
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10031326

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	231
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mr James Wellesley-Wesley
Headteacher	Nikola King
Telephone number	01359 234050
Website	www.ixworthfreeschool.org.uk
Email address	enquiries@ixworthfreeschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about the curriculum, and the school's annual reports and accounts.
- The majority of pupils are white British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement or an education, health and care plan, is below average.
- The school opened as a free school in September 2014. This was its first Ofsted inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 teachers at work in lessons. They carried out learning walks to observe pupils' learning and behaviour, and to scrutinise their work. They also walked the school with the head boy to gain an overview of the school's ethos, and how effectively it promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, a newly qualified teacher, the chair and four other members of the school's trust board, one of whom is the chief executive. They also met with two groups of pupils.
- Inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures, self-evaluation and improvement planning, minutes of meetings of the school's trust board, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, and other information provided by school leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' books in lessons. They considered 26 free-text responses sent by parents, 32 responses on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 18 questionnaires completed by staff. Pupil questionnaires were not carried out.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gwyneth Gibson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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