

Mount Grace School

Church Road, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire EN6 1EZ

Inspection dates

26–27 February 2019

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	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Overall, current pupils are not making good progress in mathematics. Despite recent improvements, too many pupils have gaps in their learning because of previous weaknesses in teaching. Pupils do not apply their skills to problem-solving and reasoning tasks well enough.
- Teachers do not consistently give pupils, particularly potential high achievers, suitably challenging work to do.
- The contribution made by individual subjects to the development of pupils' extended writing skills is too variable. This means that pupils are not always able to develop or to express their ideas as fully or as clearly as they should.
- Too often, teachers do not challenge pupils to correct basic errors in spelling, punctuation or their use of grammar effectively. These errors limit the accuracy of pupils' written work and the clarity of their expression.

The school has the following strengths

- Since the previous inspection, leaders and governors have raised standards considerably at the school. They have detailed knowledge of the school and are determined in tackling priorities for further improvement.
- Often teaching promotes pupils' progress well. The effectiveness of teaching is improving rapidly because leaders provide staff with appropriately targeted training and support.
- Leaders ensure that they identify and work to remove the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils. These pupils make progress at a similar rate to others with the same starting points.
- Typically, pupils attend and behave well. They are keen to engage in activities both inside and outside of the classroom. Pupils' positive relationships with their teachers and with each other promote their progress.
- Leaders ensure that pupils are safe and that they have ready access to appropriate help and support when they need it.
- Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum, excellent careers advice and appropriate work-experience opportunities.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress and are well prepared for the next stage of their education or for employment.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve pupils' progress by ensuring that teaching enables:
 - pupils to develop strong mathematics skills and the ability to apply their knowledge to problem-solving and reasoning tasks
 - all pupils, and in particular the most able, to complete tasks that are of an appropriate level of challenge
 - pupils to develop their literacy skills fully in different subjects, so that they write with accuracy and communicate their ideas fully and appropriately.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders, supported well by governors, have a precise understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because they monitor standards carefully. They have led significant improvements in many aspects of the school's work since the previous inspection within a challenging context, taking difficult decisions when appropriate.
- Leaders review policies and procedures thoughtfully and make carefully considered changes when necessary. For example, leaders commissioned a review of their work to minimise absence and implemented the recommended changes systematically. Attendance, which was below the national average, is now above it.
- Parents, pupils and staff are typically positive about the school's work. Comments about the 'dedicated teachers' and the 'care and support given to individual pupils', including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are representative of the views expressed by parents.
- Leaders are improving the effectiveness of teaching at the school. They set high expectations and provide teachers with precisely targeted training and support so that these can be met. In mathematics, where staffing turbulence has had a negative impact on pupils' progress, leaders are working effectively and with urgency. They are bringing about the necessary improvements.
- Subject leaders support each other well, sharing expertise and ensuring that changes happen in a coordinated manner. The subject leader for English, for example, is working with other leaders and teachers to help pupils improve their literacy skills in different subjects.
- Leaders promote equality of opportunity effectively. Disadvantaged pupils currently on roll typically make as much progress as others who have the same starting points. This is because senior leaders have identified what holds back their learning and are providing individual pupils with the support that they need to overcome any barriers.
- Leaders monitor pupils' progress carefully. Subject leaders check the standard of pupils' work against that in other schools. This helps to assure them that teachers are assessing pupils' work accurately, and to plan effective support for pupils who have fallen behind.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is effective. Leaders identify individual pupils' needs precisely, put in place well-targeted additional support, and check regularly that it is proving effective. Training enables staff to understand how best to meet these pupils' needs. As a result, pupils with SEND typically make good progress in most subjects from their individual starting points and grow in confidence.
- Pupils are being suitably prepared for life in modern Britain. Teachers often promote discussion and debate, including within lessons on citizenship. Pupils gain a mature understanding of the importance of democracy and the rule of law because they regularly consider controversial issues that are in the news. They demonstrate respect for those who have different lifestyles, beliefs or backgrounds.
- Leaders use the Year 7 catch-up funding effectively to support pupils who need extra help with their literacy and numeracy when they start at the school. Staff carefully

identify the gaps in these pupils' knowledge and understanding and specialist teachers work with pupils to close these.

- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils can choose from a full range of subject options at key stage 4 despite the school's relatively small size. In the sixth form, students can choose from a very wide range of academic and vocational subjects.

Governance of the school

- Members of the governing body have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They are ambitious for the school. Governors provide insistent challenge to the school's leaders and ask incisive questions about the school's most urgent improvement priorities.
- Governors ensure that they supplement the information provided to them by leaders with other evidence about how well the school is doing. This includes through governor visits and external reviews of aspects of the school's work. This enables them to gain the fullest possible picture of standards and to hold leaders to account for them.
- Governors regularly check on the progress leaders are making towards the objectives in the school's action plans. They focus, in particular, on how well disadvantaged pupils are supported and how far pupils are making the progress that they should in mathematics and science. Governors have an accurate view about standards in these and in other areas.
- Governors use their significant experience, and their learning from well-targeted training, to meet their statutory responsibilities effectively, including with respect to safeguarding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that all relevant checks are carried out and recorded appropriately before staff are appointed to work at the school. The records of these are kept securely.
- Staff are alert to any signs that might indicate a pupil is at risk or vulnerable. Staff know the procedures to follow if they have concerns, because they are properly trained. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities work determinedly with the relevant external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils get the support that they need.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel very safe at school and that they understand how to stay safe in a range of situations, including when using the internet. They said that 'There is always someone to talk to', including the school's full-time counsellor. Parents' replies to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, typically agree that their children are safe at school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching is not promoting pupils' progress in mathematics well enough. Some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding because of recent turbulence in

staffing and a legacy of weaknesses in teaching. Leaders are promoting improvement with urgency but too many pupils have insufficient opportunity to apply their mathematics knowledge to problem-solving and reasoning tasks.

- The extent to which teachers provide pupils with appropriately challenging work is too variable, particularly at key stage 3. Too often the most able complete tasks that they find too easy, and the less able are moved on to the next task before they have mastered the last. Key stage 3 pupils sometimes lack clear understanding of the targets they are working towards and how to meet them.
- Pupils have a secure understanding of the characteristics of effective extended writing in some subjects but not in all. Some teachers do not challenge pupils so that they correct errors in the spelling of commonly used words, or in their use of punctuation. These issues limit pupils' ability to communicate their ideas as well as they might.
- Many aspects of teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection. Teachers often have high expectations of pupils, particularly at key stage 4. Their use of questioning encourages pupils to think deeply, or to consider the responses or viewpoints of others. This is a particular strength in business studies, citizenship, design and technology, English and history.
- Pupils enjoy positive working relationships with their teachers, who are enthusiastic and supportive. Teachers have established classroom routines which pupils follow without needing to be reminded. As a result, transitions between tasks are managed well and learning opportunities are maximised.
- Pupils benefit from their teachers' detailed subject knowledge and careful sequencing of learning tasks, particularly at key stage 4. This builds pupils' knowledge and understanding and their ability to make links between the things they know. In history, for example, this helps pupils to grasp how events often have many connected causes.
- Teachers encourage pupils to learn from their mistakes, and to test their ideas even when they are not sure. This builds pupils' resilience and alerts teachers to their misconceptions. Teachers change the way they explain things when pupils have not understood.
- Teachers often provide pupils with the opportunity to plan, review and redraft their work, responding to the feedback they are given. In modern foreign languages, for example, this enables pupils to develop what are initially simple phrases into complex sentences containing varied tenses and powerful descriptions.
- Support assistants make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. They monitor pupils' progress carefully and work with teachers to plan appropriate help and support for individuals.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff have positive relationships with pupils, who they know well. They use this information to provide pupils with appropriate care, guidance and support. The advice

that pupils receive before they choose their key stage 4 options, for example, is carefully tailored to what staff know about individuals' interests, aptitudes and ambitions.

- Leaders also ensure through regular discussions with pupils that they gain an understanding of individuals' barriers to learning. They then put support in place to remove these, such as providing computers or books for pupils who do not have access to them at home.
- Leaders ensure that potentially vulnerable pupils get the help that they need so that they continue to attend school and make the progress of which they are capable. The support provided to those who are young carers is a notable example of this work.
- Pupils benefit from a wealth of up-to-date careers guidance. Pupils appreciate the opportunity to meet employers at the school's annual 'careers fair' and often take advantage of work experience opportunities, including some in leading national and international companies. These promote pupils' ambition and ability to gain access to their chosen courses or careers.
- Pupils participate in a range of different activities that help to promote their personal development and make a positive contribution to the school and wider community. Many serve as sports leaders, raise money to support children's education in Zambia, or help to run events. A large proportion of pupils learn a musical instrument or play competitive sport. Many participate in drama productions such as 'The Little Shop of Horrors', enjoyed by an audience of primary school pupils at the time of the inspection.
- Pupils enjoy participating in school trips and visits, which often give them an insight into other cultures, and bring their classroom learning to life. Pupils who attended the Dubai trip told inspectors how this had given them insights into the way global businesses operate, which they used to inform discussions in their business studies lessons.
- Pupils told inspectors that bullying, including racial or homophobic bullying, is rare but that it is dealt with effectively by teachers on the rare occasions that it does occur. This view is supported by the school's monitoring information.
- Pupils learn about a variety of risks and how to minimise them, as well as how to stay healthy, through the school's 'Thrive' programme. They learn, for example, how to recognise 'toxic relationships' or mental health issues, and how they can get help and support if they need it. Pupils also gain a secure understanding of how to stay safe in a range of situations, including when using the internet.
- Leaders make appropriate checks on the attendance, safety and well-being of pupils who attend alternative provision.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- In the classroom, pupils usually listen attentively to their teachers and to each other. They get down to work quickly and generally try hard. Pupils' behaviour often aids learning and they usually take a pride in their work. The incidence of low-level disruption, which was too high at the time of the previous inspection, is now unusual.

- Pupils socialise companionably during break periods and behave well within the school's large site, which they treat with respect. Leaders have worked well to reduce pupils' casual use of inappropriate language, so that it is now rare.
- Staff work well to support pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour. As a result, there has been a considerable reduction in the incidence of repeated or serious misconduct since the time of the previous inspection. The incidence of fixed-term exclusion is now infrequent.
- Attendance, which was too low at the time of the previous inspection, is now above the national average because of leaders' effective work to remove barriers to pupils attending school regularly. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has increased markedly. Staff monitor individuals' attendance patterns and provide swift support when necessary.
- Occasionally, when pupils complete work that is not engaging or that is of an inappropriate level of challenge for them, a few pupils drift off task or engage in behaviour that distracts others.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Most year groups join the school with attainment that is in line with the national average. In 2018, pupils' progress in mathematics, science and geography was below that of others nationally. Leaders have taken carefully considered actions which have led to pupils making improving but not consistently good progress in each subject. Therefore, outcomes for pupils require improvement.
- In 2017 and 2018, disadvantaged pupils made too little progress from their starting points by the end of key stage 4 and underachieved. Leaders have taken effective steps to remove the barriers to learning for these pupils and to close gaps in their knowledge and understanding. These pupils' progress is now close to that of others with the same starting points.
- The progress made by the most able pupils is too variable, both between and within different subjects. This is because these pupils complete work that often does not demand enough of them.
- Too often, pupils make careless errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar without these being challenged effectively by their teachers. This limits the accuracy of pupils' writing. Sometimes they complete extended writing tasks without being clear about the relevant subject-specific requirements. This restricts their ability to convey their meaning as well as they might.
- In 2017 and 2018, pupils made good progress and achieved highly in a range of GCSE subjects, including art, business studies, history, physical education and product design. The school's monitoring information indicates current pupils' progress in subjects other than mathematics and science is typically strong, and particularly so in English. Inspection evidence supports these findings.
- In most subjects, pupils with SEND make good progress from their individual starting points, because teachers and teaching assistants work well together to plan activities that meet these pupils' needs.

- Pupils who attend alternative provision typically follow appropriate courses which enable them to achieve a range of qualifications, including English and mathematics.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have ensured that sixth-form students have benefited from more effective teaching, and more appropriate guidance about which courses to study. As a result, in 2018, overall, students made good progress in their academic qualifications, and their progress in vocational qualifications was in line with the national average. Current students are making good progress in most subjects.
- Leaders monitor standards in the sixth form carefully and intervene quickly when improvements are needed. Students are making better progress than was the case at the time of the previous inspection in a number of subjects, including the sciences.
- Leaders and teachers know individual students well. They monitor each student's progress carefully and any student at risk of falling behind receives timely additional support so that they get back on track. Vulnerable students are well provided for.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to interest and motivate students who are keen to do their best. Leaders have encouraged teachers to set students challenging tasks and to require them to think hard about what they learn. Lessons are often characterised by high-level discussion and debate.
- Students make very productive use of their independent study periods within school. This is because teachers set them tasks that enable them to build on the knowledge they gain during lessons, or that involve them applying what they know to demanding questions.
- Students behave and attend well. Leaders monitor attendance carefully. They provide swift support if a student's attendance starts to decline. As a result, overall attendance in the sixth form has risen significantly in recent years and is above that in the rest of the school.
- Students appreciate the careers guidance and work experience they receive. It is planned very well so that it is relevant to each individual's interests and ambitions. Students told inspectors that it helps them gain access to courses or apprenticeships that will prepare them for careers in 'everything from cruise ship management to chemical engineering'.
- Students benefit from extensive help when applying to university, for apprenticeships or for employment. The proportion of students who go on to university or employment is above the national average. Courses in financial management and cooking healthy food on a budget also help prepare students for the next stage of their lives.
- Sixth-form students volunteer within the school community, including as learning mentors who support younger pupils with their studies. These activities promote students' personal development.
- All sixth-form students who spoke with inspectors said that they felt safe at school and valued the guidance they receive about how to recognise and minimise different risks.

School details

Unique reference number	137224
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10084428

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	587
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	100
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Colin Daniel
Headteacher	Peter Baker
Telephone number	01707 655512
Website	www.mountgrace.org.uk
Email address	head@mountgrace.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	31 January – 1 February 2017

Information about this school

- This school is a smaller than average-sized secondary school, with a below average number of girls.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who are from ethnic minority backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language is below that found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion who have an education, health and care plan is below the national average.

- The school makes use of alternative provision for a small number of pupils at The Park Education Support Centre, but at the time of the inspection no pupils were attending alternative provision.
- There have been a number of staffing changes and changes to middle leadership since the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a large number of lessons. Some observations were carried out with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors scrutinised the quality of work in a large number of pupils' books.
- Inspectors had meetings with six groups of pupils and spoke with pupils in classes and during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with members of the local governing body; the headteacher; other leaders and teachers; members of the support staff and a representative of the local authority, which is providing support to the school.
- Information was considered relating to safeguarding; pupils' attendance and behaviour; progress and achievement; leaders' evaluation of the quality of education; leaders' improvement planning; the curriculum; and the work of external agencies working with the school.
- Inspectors considered the views of 282 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. No responses were recorded to Ofsted's pupil or staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Jason Howard, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rowena Simmons	Ofsted Inspector
David Piercy	Ofsted Inspector
Al Mistrano	Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019