

Houghton Regis Academy

Parkside Drive, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5PX

Inspection dates

23–24 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Weak leadership has led to standards declining since the previous inspection. Trustees and leaders have been too slow to address areas that needed to improve.
- Until recently, leaders have not had an accurate view of the school's effectiveness.
- Middle leaders are not sufficiently clear about key priorities and their roles or responsibilities linked to whole-school improvement.
- Assessment information is not sufficiently accurate to be able to spot underachievement. As a result, weaknesses are not acted upon.
- Leaders do not monitor teaching, learning and assessment well enough. Staff are not helped to improve their practice sufficiently well.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low. Work set does not develop pupils' understanding or skills broadly enough.
- The trust's support has not been effective in helping to raise standards.
- The curriculum is not matched closely enough to what pupils need. In some areas, coverage of the curriculum is superficial.
- Last year's outcomes were poor, especially in English and history. Boys, lower-ability pupils and most-able pupils made particularly weak progress.
- Pupils' progress over time, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is poor. Staff are not held to account for pupils' lack of progress sufficiently well.
- Disadvantaged pupils make inadequate progress because support has not enabled them to overcome their barriers to learning.
- Some pupils wilfully disrupt the learning of others because staff do not apply the behaviour policy consistently well.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils feel safe. Most say they enjoy school and like the community spirit that it provides.
- Leaders have improved pupils' attendance this year and have significantly reduced the number of pupils missing school frequently.
- Useful careers advice helps pupils to make informed choices about their next steps.
- The trust now knows the school well. Since September 2018, it has provided more support and can show impact in some areas.
- Teaching and learning are typically better in key stage 4.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and raise outcomes by:
 - equipping teachers with the skills and support to manage behaviour in order to reduce disruption and make full use of time in lessons for learning
 - sharpening questioning so that staff can assess pupils' understanding more effectively and adapt learning where misconceptions remain
 - raising teachers' expectations of how much pupils, especially boys and the most able, can and should achieve, so that pupils achieve well and take pride in what they do.
- Improve outcomes so that pupils' progress is at least in line with national expectations by:
 - linking support for disadvantaged pupils more closely to their needs, so that they attain as well as other pupils nationally
 - analysing the impact and effectiveness of the assistance given to pupils with SEND and taking appropriate actions to address weaknesses
 - ensuring that teachers plan work, especially in English, that meets pupils' different needs.
- Improve pupils' attitudes to learning in lessons by:
 - setting high expectations of pupils and planning learning that captures and retains their interest
 - eradicating the extremely poor behaviour of a significant minority by ensuring that all staff apply the behaviour management policy consistently well.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring effective support from the multi-academy trust (MAT)
 - having clear plans in place to address the significant inadequacies in the school's provision
 - reviewing the curriculum to ensure that it meets all pupils' needs, especially lower-attaining pupils
 - urgently embedding new plans and strategies to secure rapid improvement across the school, especially in English and for most-able pupils
 - developing the role and influence of middle leaders in driving improvement
 - improving the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment across the

curriculum and linking this to good-quality training, so that teachers' practice improves quickly

- spending additional funding effectively to meet the needs of pupils with SEND or who are disadvantaged.

An external review of the use of pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders and trustees have not addressed the areas for improvement highlighted in the previous inspection report. Many weaknesses remain.
- Previously over-inflated views of the school's effectiveness have led to development plans that do not target all of the school's key priorities.
- Leaders' checks on the quality of teaching and learning are not effective in supporting improvements. Where issues are identified, they are not linked closely enough to teachers' training. Previously, programmes to help teachers develop were optional and had limited impact on raising standards. Until recently, checks on the quality of pupils' work were too sporadic and did not highlight the significant underachievement. Leaders did not have a clear picture of the effectiveness of certain departments.
- In some subjects, teachers' predictions of how well pupils are doing are not accurate. Some work in English is being graded at the higher levels despite poor sentence structure, incorrect syntax, limited use of vocabulary, spelling errors, and insufficient critical analysis or evaluation in the written content. Inaccuracies have not been picked up during monitoring or quality assurance processes.
- The trust identified behaviour as a severe barrier to learning two months ago. The interim principal has introduced a new system, but teachers do not yet apply this consistently. Significant behavioural issues remain, partly because leaders have prioritised key stage 4 and placed the most experienced teachers in these classes. Younger pupils often do not receive an acceptable standard of education.
- Leaders' use of additional funding is not effective, and so disadvantaged pupils still do not make sufficient progress. The support pupils receive is not matched closely to their needs, and leaders do not evaluate the impact of the spending well enough to know what actions have been most effective.
- Leaders do not ensure that the school meets the needs of pupils with SEND. They do not adequately monitor and evaluate the support provided to be able to make the necessary improvements where needed.
- While middle leaders know the key improvements required in their subject areas, they are not sufficiently clear about the quality of teaching and learning in their departments. Collectively, they do not show a clear understanding of whole-school improvement priorities, or their role in driving improvements.
- Although the curriculum is broad, and there is a good vocational offer, it is not sufficiently personalised. Some lower-attaining pupils, taking the same number of GCSEs as their most-able peers, struggle with the workload. Additionally, while some departments, notably science, have good sequencing of learning, this is not seen across other subjects. In history in Year 9, for example, pupils covered the 1930s, the First World War and the period between 1745 and 1901, in a three-week period. The new leadership team is aware of the limitations around the school's curriculum and a review is currently being carried out with the trust.
- The curriculum is extended effectively by a variety of clubs and after-school activities,

including the Duke of Edinburgh Award, a miniature wargame club and sporting activities. Pupils say the extra-curricular activities, alongside external speakers, visits to universities and residential trips, help them to develop a range of skills while pushing them to aim higher.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is mostly developed successfully. Pupils learn about fundamental British values in timetabled lessons. This is supplemented by frequent discussions in tutor groups where they talk about politics, democracy and the importance of respect and tolerance.
- Pupils say that this is a school where it is fine to be different and any issues linked to discrimination are tackled quickly and effectively. As one pupil said, 'The school is small and like a family.'
- The school has achieved some notable successes with pupils who have arrived from other schools with a history of disrupted education. One parent highlighted how her previously 'angry, emotional, frustrated and unhappy child ... is now a happier and confident young lady'.
- Leaders are determined to bring about rapid improvements. The staff survey was very positive about the immediate impact of recent changes. Staff say that, 'Mutual support has increased', and, 'We all feel encouraged to thoroughly back the new changes and strong vision for the school as a result.'
- The new leadership team is responsive to recent support from the trust and is accessing a range of trust resources to address weaknesses. Leaders are starting to improve some of the school's provision, albeit from low starting points.

Governance of the school

- The trust, which is the body responsible for standards within the school, has not been effective in securing the necessary improvements since the previous inspection. The support provided over time did not prevent a significant drop in results in 2018.
- Since September 2018, the trust has adopted a much closer working relationship with the school than before. The trust's director of assurance monitors leaders' progress against the trust's targets. Reports provide a detailed and accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The trust leads on safeguarding and this work remains highly effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders maintain thorough and vigilant records and have a clear understanding of local issues that could present risks to pupils' safety. The close and effective working arrangements with other agencies, and swift follow-up actions, help to keep pupils safe.
- All the pupils spoken with during the inspection say that they feel safe and well looked after. They highlighted the close-knit community feel of the school.
- While inspectors noted poor behaviour, they did not see any behaviour that presented

risks to pupils' safety.

- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through assemblies, tutor group sessions, British values lessons and a range of visits, including from theatre groups and the police.
- The single central record meets requirements, and all the necessary pre-employment checks on staff are completed assiduously.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Pupils make too little progress over time. Teachers do not consistently plan work that takes account of what pupils already know and can do. Pupils often undertake the same work, meaning that most-able pupils are not challenged enough and pupils who need support struggle to complete tasks.
- Teachers' expectations are not high enough. Too many lessons consist of pupils, especially boys, completing low-level tasks that occupy them without demonstrably developing their skills or knowledge.
- Over time, work in books is often scruffy or incomplete. There are too many pupils who do not show any pride in their work. Where teachers highlight that work is missing or unfinished, there is insufficient follow-up or action by pupils and teachers.
- Teachers do not check pupils' understanding well enough. Questioning is superficial, misconceptions are not picked up and learning is not adapted so that these can be addressed. Pupils continue to make the same mistakes over time.
- In some lessons, teachers do not manage behaviour well and this severely disrupts the learning of others. Some pupils refuse to engage in activities and a minority show a blatant disrespect towards staff. This contributes to pupils' progress in these subjects being weak over time.
- Where practice is most effective, more often in key stage 4 and subjects such as mathematics, science and art, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do. They plan work that provides effective challenge, check pupils' understanding continually, adapt learning where necessary and instil a sense of enthusiasm in pupils. This enables pupils in these classes to make good progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils spoken with during the inspection said they feel safe and enjoy school. Pupils said that bullying is rare. When bullying does happen, it is mainly name-calling and pupils being unkind to each other. Pupils feel that staff deal with these issues quickly and effectively.
- Pupils are positive about the careers advice and the support they receive to help them

decide their next steps for education or employment. Links with local providers, including colleges, universities and local businesses, give pupils opportunities to broaden their horizons and gain wider experiences that help to raise their aspirations. Staff support some pupils to complete a work placement in their holidays, which helps to secure sustained destinations when they leave. The school is on track to meet the new government careers strategy benchmarks by the 2020 deadline.

- Staff make regular and frequent checks on pupils who attend alternative provision. The pupils attend well and are making good progress, both socially and academically.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- There are a significant minority of pupils whose poor behaviour severely hampers the learning of others. Inspectors noted pupils showing a blatant disregard and lack of respect towards some of their teachers by ignoring instructions and refusing to comply with reasonable requests. In other lessons, inspectors saw pupils not paying attention, not listening and not doing any work. Pupils say that their learning is interrupted by other pupils' poor behaviour.
- Too many pupils adopt a casual approach to their learning. Many arrive without the correct equipment and take too long to settle, preventing a swift and effective start to lessons.
- Pupils' conduct varies too widely, mainly dependent on age. Older pupils typically move around the school in a calm and orderly fashion. At breaktime, these same pupils queue patiently and greet visitors politely. Some younger pupils are overly loud and boisterous. They use inappropriate language and lack the self-discipline to arrive at lessons on time and ready to learn.
- Less experienced staff generally teach more in key stage 3, and this is where most behavioural problems were seen to occur. Some Year 7 pupils say that, on average, about 18 of their 25 lessons each week are disrupted. This severely impacts on the progress that pupils make in these classes.
- Leaders have prioritised the development of pupils' behaviour. They have introduced a new system, but this is not applied consistently by all staff. There are still too many pupils being removed from lessons. Some pupils overtly flout the system because they feel that the provision in the inclusion room is an easy option.
- There have been no permanent exclusions since the previous inspection. However, fixed-term exclusions are still high. Leaders highlight that a significant proportion of exclusions have been for pupils who are new to the school.
- Pupils attend well. The attendance figures for all groups of pupils have improved significantly since September 2018. The number of pupils who regularly miss school is now much lower than previously, and broadly in line with national figures. An attendance officer now oversees attendance and follows up absences quickly, sends letters where required and works with parents and other agencies to help pupils attend more often. Overall attendance has increased by almost 1% and persistent absence has reduced by more than 4%, which is slightly better than national figures.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Too many pupils do not develop their knowledge, understanding or skills well enough. Across subjects and year groups, too many pupils do not make sufficient progress, including the most able. This is mainly, but not exclusively, in key stage 3. Pupils, particularly in Year 7, rarely complete their work and presentation of work often deteriorates over time.
- Published information shows that pupils achieved significantly below the national average across too many subjects last year. The school's information shows that current Year 11 pupils' progress in some subjects is improving rapidly, but inspection evidence does not support this view.
- Last year, pupils' average progress in English at the end of key stage 4 dropped by almost a grade from the previous year. Most-able pupils fared even worse, with results in English and history being almost two and three grades below the national average respectively.
- Improving the progress of disadvantaged pupils was identified as a key priority in the previous inspection report. While disadvantaged pupils did better in 2017 across most subject areas, the gains were not sustained in 2018. In fact, despite leaders and the trust identifying this as a priority, the progress of this group fell significantly. The school's most recent information shows some improvement. However, disadvantaged pupils continue to underachieve.
- Current pupils' progress is far too variable both across and within subjects because it is closely linked to the effectiveness and the continuity of the teaching and behaviour management that pupils experience.
- The progress of current pupils with SEND is improving slightly. However, there is still not sufficient consistency in the approach to addressing the pupils' needs so that they can make comparable progress to their peers.
- Where practice is most effective, for example in mathematics, science and art, pupils make good progress over time. In history, the work in pupils' books confirms that there has been a significant improvement since November 2018.
- Pupils benefit from carefully tailored careers advice. Some pupils choose apprenticeships linked to their chosen career path. Over a three-year period, the proportion of students progressing to education, employment or training has increased year by year, and is now broadly in line with the national average.

School details

Unique reference number	138569
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10058679

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	317
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Wayne Norrie (chief executive)
Principal	John Spurling
Telephone number	01582 863294
Website	www.houghtonregisacademy.org
Email address	admin@houghtonregisacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	21–22 September 2016

Information about this school

- Houghton Regis Academy is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. It was previously a middle school. It first entered pupils for key stage 4 qualifications in summer 2016.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils known to be entitled to the pupil premium is above average.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average. The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is broadly in line with the national average.
- The principal in charge at the time of the previous inspection left the school in December 2018. There have been significant changes in the school's leadership team. The previous principal was succeeded by the deputy principal at the end of the autumn term. This inspection took place three weeks into his tenure.

- Houghton Regis Academy opened in September 2012 under the sponsorship of the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust. The multi-academy trust remains the same but is now known as Greenwood Academies Trust.
- Governance is provided by the trust. Education directors work with schools and provide at least termly reports to the trust's standards and inclusion committee which, in turn, reports to the trust board. The local academy advisory board acts as a critical friend to the principal but has no legal responsibilities. Accountability remains with the trust.
- The school uses off-site alternative provision at the Academy of Central Bedfordshire (URN 139411).

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors gathered a range of evidence from: observations in all year groups and across a broad range of subjects, some carried out with senior leaders; short visits to lessons; discussions with pupils and staff; meetings with the interim principal and senior leaders, middle leaders, staff, including newly qualified teachers, three pupil groups, three trust directors, the trust chief executive; reviews of pupils' work in books; reviews of the school's website, documents and assessment information; and general observations of the daily operations of the school, including social times.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the chair of the academy advisory council.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to gain feedback. Inspectors analysed the five free-text responses to the same questionnaire.
- The inspection team received one pupil survey and 21 questionnaires from staff.

Inspection team

John Randall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Karen Kerridge

Ofsted Inspector

Andrew Hemmings

Her Majesty's 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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