

The Reach Free School

Long Lane, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire WD3 8AB

Inspection dates

27–28 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership is outstanding because leaders and governors have very successfully established a school that is highly ambitious for its pupils, academically, socially and in preparing them for the world.
- As the school has built up from just having a Year 7 to now having Years 7 to 12, leaders have very successfully maintained the positive ethos and community atmosphere, leading to outstanding personal development, behaviour and welfare.
- In the school's first year of taking external examinations, a far higher proportion of pupils than average took GCSE examinations in science, modern foreign languages and the humanities. Impressively, the results showed pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, doing particularly well in these subject areas.
- Overall, in 2018, pupils' progress by the end of Year 11 was in line with that of other pupils nationally. Pupils that have been part of the school since Year 7 did very well. Current pupils make increasingly better progress over their time in the school.
- The excellent relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils create an extremely positive atmosphere. Pupils get on well together. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary.
- Effective routines for teaching and learning have a positive impact. Teachers display very secure subject knowledge, which gives pupils confidence.
- The new sixth form has been created successfully. The first small group of students are benefiting from teachers' secure A-level subject knowledge, together with a well-planned curriculum.
- While teaching, learning and assessment overall are good, pupils' progress is sometimes slowed because some teaching does not meet the different needs and abilities of the most or least able pupils.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes further, by ensuring that:
 - teachers more consistently check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching to secure the rapid progress of even more pupils
 - teachers adapt their teaching and questioning to meet the needs of the least able pupils and challenge the most able.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher and other senior staff created the school with a clear vision and ethos that have been retained throughout its expansion. Leaders are realistic about the school's strengths and further areas for development. They know their school very well.
- Since moving to the new site in September 2018, leaders, staff and pupils have together rapidly built a positive reputation. They have quickly gained the confidence of the local community and potential parents and carers. Parents are highly positive about the school.
- There is a highly supportive accountability system for all staff. Performance management is used exceptionally well to set expectations and determine teachers' development needs. Staff at all levels appreciate the support, guidance and training they receive to improve their teaching.
- Leaders support trainee teachers and newly qualified teachers very effectively and indeed, teachers at all stages of their career. Staff are encouraged to make use of external qualifications to enhance their practice and leadership skills.
- Leaders give initial teacher training and preparing potential teachers a very high priority. The school's 'assistant teacher' role is structured so that potential teachers have the experience and understanding to make informed decisions when applying for training.
- The curriculum is highly ambitious. For example, 85% of pupils take a group of GCSE subjects that lead to the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), the government's preferred GCSE subject choices. This is a much higher proportion than found in most schools and is almost meeting the government's target for 2022. The key stage 3 curriculum is broad. For example, the arts (through music, art and drama) have an increasing profile, and enterprise in key stage 3 provides a useful background for those pupils who choose to study GCSE business in key stage 4. There are appropriate courses for the minority of pupils not following the full suite of EBacc subjects. These courses are chosen to meet the demands of the local labour market, for example travel and tourism and information technology.
- The curriculum, assemblies and 'electives' (the end-of-day, non-GCSE short courses that pupils choose to broaden and deepen their experience of education) ensure that pupils are prepared well for adult life. Their knowledge and understanding of British values are very strong and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is largely very positive. Religious and moral topics are covered through assemblies and tutor time.
- The school gives a very high priority to the development of basic English and mathematical skills within the curriculum. For example, leaders have decided that the first lessons every day for Years 7 and 8 are English and mathematics. Another distinctive feature of the school is the daily 'Reach for a Book' reading time. This helps to ensure that pupils enjoy reading and have the literacy skills to read texts in different subjects.

- Middle leaders are highly effective. They ensured that staff were well prepared for the first round of external examinations and for A-level teaching from September 2018.
- The school has a significant number of disadvantaged pupils entitled to the pupil premium. It has mainly used this funding to pay for staff who provide a high level of personalised support for these disadvantaged pupils and to address the barriers to learning for individual pupils. The impact is seen in the high level of successful entries at GCSE in science, languages and humanities.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported very well. Additional funding is used effectively to ensure that they make progress that is in line with that of their peers.
- Catch-up additional funding for pupils who arrive in Year 7 with low attainment in English and mathematics has been used very well. The premium has been spent on smaller group teaching in mathematics, paying for a member of staff who teaches a small class. As the pupils reach age-related expectations, they transfer to normal lessons. For pupils below the national standard in literacy, a structured programme is used during 'Reach for a Book', helping pupils to improve their literacy in addition to timetabled English lessons. Most Year 7 pupils following this programme reached age-related expectations, successfully catching up with their peers.
- Very nearly all staff responding to Ofsted's questionnaire agree that they are proud to work at the school and enjoy working there. Morale is high. Staff feel very well supported by leaders, both in the management of behaviour and in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The overwhelming majority of staff reported that leaders take workload into account. A typical comment was, 'Initiatives such as whole-class feedback, and the way in which the school responds to staff concerns raised through the regular staff surveys, proves that the school is willing to listen and act to make workload more manageable.'
- Although teaching is not yet highly effective across the school, leaders analyse strengths and areas for further improvement accurately. As the school has rapidly expanded, preparing for the first public examinations at GCSE and the introduction of the sixth form, the actions of leaders to improve teaching have been appropriate and successful.

Governance of the school

- Governance is very strong. Governors have shared leaders' vision for the school since its establishment.
- Governors bring a wide range of senior-level experience from industry and education. They have used their career backgrounds to provide practical assistance to leaders during the planning and building on the school's new site. As a result, leaders were able to minimise the distraction of contract management and retain an effective focus on pupils' education.
- Governors challenge leaders exceptionally well. Meetings are preceded by many questions for leaders. Governors have been proactive in identifying potential areas of weakness before the first public examinations. For example, they identified that pupils were making insufficient progress in science and languages. They required leaders to

take action in these areas, resulting in pupils doing extremely well in these subjects in their GCSE examinations.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All statutory requirements are met and regularly checked by governors.
- Pupils, all staff and the vast majority of parents say that pupils are safe. This is because the school is a friendly community where everyone looks out for one another.
- Professional relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils are known well by teachers and leaders, and pupils feel confident in approaching staff. All staff and governors are trained regularly in safeguarding, including in the government's 'Prevent' duty. Staff know what to do if there are any concerns and they take appropriate action as issues arise.
- Pupils feel safe because the site is very secure. Pupils know how to stay safe online. Additionally, staff and pupils have a very efficient approach to recording concerns through a confidential system.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers' assured subject knowledge gives confidence to their teaching. In return, pupils seek and respond well to teachers' advice on how to improve. One-to-one support in lessons is valued by pupils. Pupils told inspectors that the best thing about the school is that the teachers are always available to help them. Professional relationships are strong and productive. Pupils feel very well supported by their teachers.
- The school's investment in information technology provides pupils with enhanced opportunities for learning in and out of lessons. This is used very effectively.
- There is very effective use of learning time in lessons. This results from pupils' excellent behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Teachers are clear about how the lesson should flow. For the most part, they have clear expectations of the learning that should take place.
- Year 7 pupils get a very good start in literacy and numeracy. Inspectors could see the positive impact of the school's focus on reading across the curriculum. Pupils read confidently and fluently. Mathematics is well taught.
- The recently introduced whole-class feedback policy is coherently applied and pupils value the helpful feedback. Recent changes to the assessment policy are having an impact on freeing up time for lesson planning, which is largely very effective.
- Pupils who are falling behind are given effective additional support in lessons and in additional opportunities outside lessons.
- Pupils' books demonstrate good progress across their subjects, although occasionally there were gaps where pupils had not completed work.
- There is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching. Not all teaching sets appropriate

work that matches the needs of the most- and least able pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The over-riding impression for a visitor is of a happy, relaxed community with confident pupils working in lessons and relaxing in breaks with great maturity. As a parent expressed it, 'I am happy with the school, as it is helping and supporting my child to feel proud and get confidence in addition to learning curriculum subjects.'
- Pupils' welfare is at the heart of the school's work and pupils value the help they get. Pastoral leaders have clear roles and responsibility for staff. The new role of deputy head of house is having a positive impact.
- Staff have a very clear understanding of safeguarding and what to do if they have concerns. Pupils understand how to stay safe because of an effective curriculum that teaches about staying safe and healthy.
- Pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school. For example, in an assembly, a letter from a member of the public was displayed. This was referring to 'impeccable conduct' and 'courtesy' by five pupils on a local bus. Around the school, pupils are remarkably polite and welcoming to visitors.
- The school places a very high priority on learning beyond academic subjects to prepare pupils for the wider world. Parents are appreciative of teachers' work in making life experiences, such as skiing, school trips and cultural experiences, possible and affordable to pupils whatever their circumstances.
- There is excellent pastoral and academic support for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. A few parents felt that the school had not done enough to secure education, health and care (EHC) plans for their children. Where these had been applied for, applications were successful, and parents commended the support of the school.
- The main school provides a good deal of time to promote physical well-being through exercise. Equally, staff place a strong emphasis on addressing emotional and mental health issues. The learning mentor for children who are looked after supports their pastoral and academic development well.
- Pupils from different backgrounds get on extremely well together. As a pupil told an inspector, 'It's okay to be different here.' Pupils learn to respect one another's views and debate topics such as Brexit with respect for alternative points of view.
- Pupils present their work well and wear their uniforms proudly and smartly.
- Leaders have analysed the school's progress towards meeting the Gatsby benchmarks (the government's expectations for secondary schools' delivery of careers education and guidance) and it is well on track to meet them fully. For example, by the time they leave school, most pupils have 'meaningfully experienced career learning' in English, mathematics, science, and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons.

- The extended school day, together with the active involvement of governors, enables pupils to benefit from a wide range of activities that promote their personal development, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, enterprise activities, volunteering and dog training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school at break- and lunchtime is exemplary. Pupils say that behaviour is very good. All staff responding to Ofsted's questionnaire agree that behaviour is positive. The overwhelming majority of parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, say that behaviour is good.
- Highly positive relationships between staff and pupils are evident. The positive behaviour of pupils and their eagerness to learn contribute to the success of lessons. Any low-level disruption is very rare.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is a little above average. Leaders have worked hard to reduce persistent absence. Leaders' actions to improve the poor attendance of a small group of pupils are proving successful.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2018, the overall progress of pupils from the end of key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4 was broadly average. Many of the pupils completing Year 11 in 2018 joined the school after Year 7. Generally, the more time that pupils spent in the school, the better their progress. Work in pupils' books and observation in lessons confirm the school's assessment that current pupils are making progress that is at least as good as in 2018. Progress is rising strongly at key stage 3.
- A very high proportion of pupils took a combination of GCSE subjects that lead to the EBacc. Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, made very strong progress across science, modern foreign languages and the humanities.
- The school was highly successful in ensuring that its first group of Year 11 pupils went on to worthwhile destinations. In summer 2018, all pupils in Year 11 moved on to a sixth form, a further education course or an apprenticeship.
- Disadvantaged pupils make progress overall that is broadly in line with that of other pupils nationally. This is because the school knows the abilities and needs of each pupil well, sets challenging targets and provides effective support for all pupils.
- Pupils with SEND make progress that is broadly in line with that of other pupils.
- In the school's first set of published results, pupils' progress in subjects beyond the EBacc was below average. This was partly because the school was in temporary accommodation with limited practical facilities.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The newly established sixth form is in its first year of operation. It has been well

planned.

- Teachers are well qualified and have secure subject knowledge. As in the main school, there is some variation in the quality of teaching, but generally it is effective. Consequently, early assessments indicate that all but a very few students are making good progress in their studies.
- Given the small number of students in the sixth form, the curriculum is rich. In addition to a relatively wide choice of A-level subjects, students receive a broad range of enrichment activities and have a well-designed personal, social, health, careers and economic education programme. Work experience is planned for later in Year 12. Students would like opportunities for participation in sport to be included in their programme. Distinctive aspects of the curriculum include community action in addition to Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme activity and the extended project qualification.
- Students have received extensive information, advice and guidance in making their course choices and for courses at the right level for them. Careers guidance for life after sixth form is extensive and has been well received by students.
- The only external examinations taken so far are re-sit GCSEs. The very small number of students taking this in English have already progressed to a standard pass. Students are progressing well in mathematics and are on course to achieve well in the summer.
- The school has supported students for whom the cost of travel is a barrier.

School details

Unique reference number	139662
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10087134

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 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	583
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	22
Appropriate authority	The board of governors
Chair	Carolyn Venn
Headteacher	Richard Booth
Telephone number	01923 711517
Website	www.reachfreeschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@reachfree.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 June 2015

Information about this school

- The Reach Free School opened in September 2013.
- The school currently has pupils in Year 7 to Year 12. In line with its ethos of providing a small secondary school, it remains smaller than most secondary schools. The number of pupils entering the school at times other than the usual times is high, and many pupils have joined the school after the start of Year 7.
- The sixth form admitted students from September 2018. It is currently very small, but applications for September 2019 indicate a significant expansion.
- The majority of pupils are White British.

- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average.
- There is one child looked after currently on roll at the school.
- The school does not make use of any full-time additional off-site provision for its pupils. However, three pupils spend part of their week at the Chessbrook Education Support Centre.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors gathered a range of evidence from: visits to 33 lessons carried out with the headteacher or another senior leader; discussions with pupils and staff; meetings with senior and middle leaders, the chair of the governing body and two other governors, trainee teachers and newly and recently qualified teachers, and a group of classroom teachers; reviews of pupils' work in books and folders; reviews of the school's website, documents and assessment information; and general observations of the daily operations of the school, including social areas.
- Inspectors analysed the 126 standard responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, alongside the 88 free-text responses to the same questionnaire. They also considered the 49 responses to the staff questionnaire. Inspectors also investigated the school's own internal regular pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Adrian Lyons, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
John Craig	Ofsted Inspector
James Dyke	Ofsted 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