

The Fen Rivers Academy

Kilhams Way, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE30 2HU

Inspection dates

11–12 June 2019

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have not ensured that important systems to manage pupils' behaviour have been introduced in a timely way. Policies and practices for behaviour management are not good enough.
- Pupils' behaviour is not managed consistently well. There are too many times when physical restraint is used. Staff remove some pupils to 'calm' rooms too frequently and without sufficient and rigorous reviews of the practice.
- Staff are not trained well enough to use the information about pupils' individual emotional and behaviour needs. As a result, pupils' poor behaviour causes routine disruption during the school day.
- There is too much unstructured time planned into the school day. Leaders say this is to help pupils get ready to learn, but too often pupils are bored, and this results in poor behaviour.
- Attendance is low. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is too high. Leaders do not review pupils' part-time timetables systematically enough.
- Leaders, governors and the trust do not have a coherent strategic plan that accurately identifies the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Governors do not have sufficiently precise information to hold school leaders rigorously to account.
- Leaders do not rigorously monitor the impact of their actions on raising pupils' personal and academic achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils who have been longer at the school are making suitable progress from their starting points, especially in writing.
- When challenged sufficiently, pupils often complete their activities well, particularly when working on a one-to-one basis.
- Staff are pleased to work at the school. They are dedicated and keen to see pupils achieve well.
- Pupils are safe. Procedures for child protection are in place. Staff are diligent when recording concerns.
- Governors are appropriately skilled. Within the governing body, together with the multi-academy trust (the trust) and school leaders, there is capacity to improve the work of the school.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of pupils' behaviour by:
 - using information about pupils and their behaviour needs more strategically to reduce incidents of poor behaviour
 - reviewing and making suitable amendments to the use of the 'calm' rooms and physical restraints
 - training staff effectively to understand and manage pupils' behaviour positively
 - reducing the number of pupils who attend part-time or who are persistently absent.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - making sure that the school day is used effectively to maximise pupils' engagement and learning time
 - sharpening the strategic overview and improvement planning by making best use of the information available
 - rigorously monitoring and evaluating the impact of actions so that leaders at all levels have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses
 - ensuring that the information presented to governors is sufficiently detailed, so governors can hold leaders to account for the quality of education effectively.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- The trust, Catch 22, did not ensure that sufficient and suitable policies and practices were fully in place, for the age of pupils, when the school opened in June 2018. This was particularly the case for behaviour management. Pupils' behaviour has remained poor for too many pupils, without suitable and preventative approaches being used for individual pupils.
- A great deal has been expected of the headteacher role over the course of this year. This has resulted in the headteacher becoming very operational, managing a growing school and dealing with issues about the school buildings. School improvement has therefore been slow, with many conflicting priorities. Many important systems and processes are embryonic with not enough impact seen.
- Leaders, governors and the trust have identified that changes in leadership arrangements are necessary as part of a more coherent plan for the growth of the school. They have already recruited for additional senior leadership capacity to allow for a more strategic approach to the overall management of the school. This new structure is in place from September 2019.
- The trust is providing more suitable, systematic support and challenge as it grows its own school leadership capacity and confidence. Through regular visits from the vice principal of the trust, there is a better understanding of the areas to improve, identifying priorities and directing actions. The impact of the trust's work is still in its infancy.
- Most staff were employed prior to the school opening so that training and development could take place. Although they have received appropriate training for high-level restraint, many staff do not have sufficient confidence when dealing positively with pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and the challenging behaviour that can be displayed.
- The trust has recently employed a leader to work across its schools to provide support and training for staff in positive behaviour management. It is too soon to see the impact of this work on improving pupils' behaviour at the Fen Rivers Academy.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and the advocate leaders have a good understanding of the behavioural, personal and academic needs of pupils. These leaders have appropriate knowledge and experience to perform their roles and responsibilities well. However, the information they hold about pupils and their individual needs is not used consistently across all classes to support teachers' planning or to improve the progress that pupils make.
- The leadership of teaching, learning and assessment is still at an early stage of development. While checks are made on the teaching quality, the information is not sufficiently focused on what pupils can or cannot do in response to the teaching.
- The school's assessment system is still developing and not fully in place. The accurate assessment of pupils' starting points is taking some time to verify. This is because the school's systems are not developed well enough at this time. Information is not used

well enough to plan learning that helps pupils make better progress.

- Leadership of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is in early stages. Pupils receive a great deal of social interaction time through the many scheduled opportunities in the school timetable. These opportunities are not well planned or used effectively. Too much time working alone on educational computer games, not enough resources or taking longer than scheduled to start lesson times mean that these unstructured events become opportunities for poor behaviour.
- The school had not received additional pupil premium funding at the time of the inspection. The sports premium grant is used well. Good-quality sports coaching is provided so that all pupils receive suitable physical education each week. A few pupils also benefit from football time in the hall to practise their skills and develop social interactions.
- The design of the school's curriculum is improving. The school uses the trust's chosen published scheme to deliver subjects other than English and mathematics. There is suitable coverage of the curriculum that is based on the expectations of the national curriculum. When staff adapt the curriculum well for the needs of the pupils in their class, then pupils focus, enjoy their activities and make good progress from their starting points.
- Parents and carers spoken with over the course of the inspection were appreciative of the work of the school. They commented positively on how much more settled their child is since starting at the Fen Rivers Academy and the support that they receive as families.
- Staff were equally pleased to work at the school. They felt that leaders took account of their workload and supported them well when required. Staff are dedicated and want pupils to succeed personally and academically.
- The local authority is providing additional support to some staff. The support is for moderating and helping to assess the standard of work in key stage 1. This is proving effective. The local authority provides suitable support for those pupils who are looked after.

Governance of the school

- Local governance is becoming increasingly effective. There is a very experienced chair of governors who has been involved in recruiting other skilled governors to the school. In recent weeks, the board has successfully recruited sufficient governors.
- Minutes of meetings show that governors place a high priority on pupils' safety and child protection. They ensure that procedures are appropriately in place. Through visits to the school, governors check that policies and processes are in place.
- Governors have highlighted the lack of clarity regarding policies and who is responsible for updating or amending these. There is not a clear system for doing so with the trust. New schemes of delegation have recently been written, but the procedures are not well established. Consequently, communication through the website, for example, is misleading. For example, the behaviour policy is not the one used by the school and relates to a more generic trust policy for secondary-age pupils.
- Governors do not have a strong enough understanding of the current position of the

school. This is because the school improvement planning document is unwieldy and the school evaluation of its own strengths and weaknesses is incomplete.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The work of the designated safeguarding leaders is strong. Staff and parents have confidence that children are safe. Processes and systems are in place for the protection of pupils, and leaders work well with external agencies where the need arises to ensure that pupils receive the help and support they require.
- Child protection records are appropriately kept and reviewed. For children looked after, leaders work closely with the local authority to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils are closely checked for attendance and care.
- Staff training and updates for safeguarding pupils are suitable. School records demonstrate that all staff have received the current and up-to-date training. New or temporary staff who attend the school receive a comprehensive induction process.
- Safer-recruitment processes are in place. Where there were errors found on the school's central records for the recruitment of staff or trust representatives, these were rectified over the course of the inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The wealth of information regarding pupils' individual SEMH needs, their education, health and care (EHC) plans, and the school's approach to individual education plans is not used well. Teachers do not routinely use the information, or the school's new approach to assessment, to inform their planning of lessons and unstructured social times. As a result, expectations of what pupils can do is at times too low and behaviour deteriorates.
- During structured lessons with mostly one-to-one teaching, pupils are encouraged to work and complete their activities. In a few classes, pupils receive some well-chosen and planned activities that help them focus and enjoy sensory learning. However, in too many subjects, although pupils complete a great deal of work, the individual worksheets do not link well to a sequence of learning that improves their knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers' deployment of additional adults is very mixed. In some classes, support staff are used to control behaviour or to call for additional assistance to remove pupils from class. In others, additional support staff have good relationships with pupils and add to their learning.
- Some lessons are poorly resourced. Pupils have few practical resources available to help them work independently. This is especially the case in mathematics and in some topic work. In subjects such as science, there are too many activities that involve cutting and sticking, irrespective of age or ability. Pupils are not often provided with a wide range of different subject-specific activities at which they can excel.
- There is little work that celebrates the achievements of pupils around the school or the wider work of the school's spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Walls in

shared spaces such as the hall and corridors are bare. In one class only, there is evidence of pupils' likes and dislikes displayed through their pupil profiles. The pupil profiles are shared and valued by the pupils and staff.

- The teaching of reading has recently been changed for older pupils. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of this work. Staff have received training in the chosen phonics programme and lessons are scheduled appropriately.
- Where pupils are provided with interesting and exciting opportunities to learn, then lessons flow smoothly, and pupils engage easily and well. The opportunities tend to be where teachers have thoughtfully planned and considered pupils' interests and abilities. In geography, for example, one class was successfully learning about different types of rocks through making chocolate crispy cakes in the food technology room. The pupils were using the correct vocabulary to explain their work with very effective results.
- Pupils' books show that work is completed well. Over the year, pupils have completed a great deal of work, often with an adult. Adults transfer the sheets of work into pupils' exercise books, which provides a good record of pupils' learning over time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- As pupils stay longer at the school, they are developing more trusting relationships with the adults who work at the school. Staff use the school's chosen verbal prompts with some success when interacting with pupils, as promoted through training. However, the training for staff is not precise enough to help them meet pupils' needs, especially where pupils have previously experienced some form of trauma.
- Pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is currently too ad hoc and does not help pupils learn about managing their own behaviour, feelings and thoughts. Leaders are aware of the weaknesses in PSHE and, this half term, pupils are learning how to keep safe online. A new scheme of work has been purchased for September 2019, so that pupils can receive a more considered and systematic approach that suits their needs.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions are starting to reduce this term. There have been no permanent exclusions since the school opened.
- The SENCo and the advocate leaders keep good information about pupils' personal and previous experiences. They use the information to produce pupil profiles and individual plans but, at present, adults' use of this information in class is too inconsistent.
- Pupils spoken with said that they felt safe in school. Parents who spoke with inspectors agreed that they consider their child is happy and safe. Pupils explained that their experience at the Fen Rivers Academy is more positive than was the case for them in their previous educational settings.
- Pupils stated that bullying is not an issue and that this is different to their experience in other schools. Leaders deal quickly with issues in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Many pupils start at the school with challenging behaviour and complex SEMH needs. Not enough is being done to help and support individuals. Pupils do not have a coherent behaviour plan with appropriate targets for individual improvement. There are very few strategies promoted to help pupils make better choices or develop personal approaches that help them manage their own behaviour. The lack of appropriate strategies results in poor behaviour in classes and around the school.
- There are too many incidents that result in staff using high-level restrictive physical intervention. So far in this first year, there have been 458 occurrences of physical restraint, with 50% of these resulting in pupils being detained in a 'calm room'. Leaders do not evaluate or analyse the use of physical restraint well enough. They cannot show how they are preventing this high level of intervention from reoccurring.
- The behaviour management system is unclear. Leaders state that they help pupils positively manage behaviour and make better choices. In practice, pupils are too often removed from class without any other approach being used prior to the restraint. Staff appear unconfident and do not use the training they have received well enough and, as a result, restrictive physical intervention is being used too often as a behaviour management tool. The poor behaviour choices from pupils continues.
- Too many behaviour incidents in the key stage 1 class prevent learning from taking place well enough. There are limited strategies in place for the youngest and most vulnerable pupils in school. When new pupils start at the school, the behaviour of others is affected too much. There is not a coherent plan for the introduction of new pupils into classes other than new pupils starting part time.
- Throughout the school day, there are many times when leaders have chosen to have less structure or a focus on play in class, with the aim of helping build social interaction. In reality, often there is slippage in terms of time, encroaching into the three planned lesson times. During unstructured times, pupils display belligerent or negative behaviour that results in physical restraint.
- The triggers for poor behaviour often go unnoticed or ignored during unstructured times. Adults do not intervene or use the time well enough to develop pupils' use of better behaviour management strategies or use the therapeutic approach the school promotes. In too many of the classes, unstructured times lack a sense of purpose, so the quality of pupils' behaviour changes too much.
- Pupils' attendance is low. Some pupils are currently on part-time timetables, some of whom are new to the school. The processes and procedures for pupils attending school full time is not based on a clear and transparent system. Reviews of part-time timetables are ad hoc, and records are not kept well. A few pupils have not attended school full time for the year and are not receiving their entitlement to full-time education.
- In the main, high levels of supervision ensure that most pupils' conduct is appropriate at lunchtimes. There is a sense of order and routine, resulting in pupils being relatively calm and orderly. Inspectors witnessed staff and pupils eating together in a typically social and friendly way.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Most pupils start the Fen Rivers Academy with gaps in their previous learning, and at times very low starting points due to their individual special educational needs and/or disabilities or SEMH needs.
- Overall learning in key stage 1 is not as good as it should be. Some pupils are not making the progress of which they are capable due to poor behaviour. Nonetheless, pupils' books show that the longer they have been at the school, some pupils have made good progress from very low starting points, particularly in writing.
- In key stage 2, pupils make less progress in mathematics than in English. There are fewer opportunities for pupils to build on their learning in mathematics or apply their knowledge and skills in a range of different ways. Pupils complete work that is too easy for some.
- In a range of different English activities, pupils plan and write increasingly independently. They use laptops well to record their ideas and edit and improve their written work. Older pupils make suitable progress over time, especially in English. Exercise books show that pupils are making expected progress in writing over time.
- There is no discernible difference in the progress made by different groups of pupils, such as disadvantaged pupils or children looked after.

School details

Unique reference number	141948
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10106936

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	35
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair (local governing body)	Suzanne Walker
Principal	Graham Payne (executive principal), Sue Conlon (headteacher)
Telephone number	01553 887330
Website	www.thefenriversacademy.org.uk
Email address	adminoffice@thefenriversacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Fen Rivers Academy opened in June 2018 to provide education for 96 pupils aged from 5 to 16 with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH). Leaders intend that the maximum number of primary-aged pupils will not exceed 48. Currently, there are 35 pupils who are primary-school age. There are currently no children in the early years. The secondary phase is expected to open in 2020.
- The school has been commissioned by Norfolk County Council and is sponsored by Catch 22.
- Catch 22 multi-academy trust holds financial oversight of the school. The local governing body is responsible for the quality of the curriculum and parental/community engagement.

- Pupils are referred to the school by the local authority. Most pupils travel to school via taxis that are organised by the local authority.
- The school opened phase 1 in June 2018 and has been providing education for primary-aged pupils. Phase 2 of the school is due to open in 2020 when education will be provided for secondary-aged pupils.
- All pupils have an EHC plan linked to SEMH needs.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection began as a one-day section 8 no formal designation inspection following concerns raised about pupils' behaviour and welfare, and leadership and management. The inspection was unannounced. Concerns on the first day of the inspection, regarding the number of pupil restraints, use of calm rooms and behaviour of pupils, resulted in the inspection converting to a section 5 inspection. Both inspectors remained for the second day.
- The inspectors gathered a range of information to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Evidence included observing learning in a range of subjects and through the school day.
- The inspectors spoke with a group of pupils and considered the work they produced in books. Inspectors looked at EHC plans and the school's own information to check the progress pupils make over time. Inspectors spoke informally with pupils in their classes.
- Inspectors observed pupils' conduct at breaktimes and lunchtimes, as well as the transition between lessons and around the school.
- Meetings were held with the principal and vice principal of the trust. Meetings were also held with the headteacher, other senior leaders and middle leaders. A meeting was held with the chair of governors and another representative of the trust.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including plans for future improvement and the school's evaluation of its own performance, safeguarding and attendance records, and information regarding pupils' behaviour.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including the statutory information on the recruitment of staff.
- The inspectors spoke with parents to gather their views.
- Staff views were taken account of during the inspection.

Inspection team

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Prue Rayner

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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