

Retford Oaks Academy

Babworth Road, Retford, Nottinghamshire DN22 7NJ

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The highly skilled executive principal and academy director provide strong leadership. They have secured improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection, and pupils are now making faster progress.
- Trustees and governors are knowledgeable and experienced. They are well informed and provide a high level of challenge and support.
- The dedicated team of senior and middle leaders play a valuable role in improving their respective areas. Several leaders, however, are recently appointed and their work has not yet had a sustained impact on pupils' progress.
- The quality of teaching is now typically good. Occasionally, however, teachers do not use the most effective practice, and pupils, particularly the most able pupils, do not make fast enough progress. At times, teachers accept untidy work from pupils too readily.
- Leaders ensure that the school's curriculum is effective in providing a high-quality and relevant learning experience for all pupils.
- Pupils now make good progress in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. A small number of pupils, however, do not make rapid progress in some subjects, especially the most able pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils are catching up with other pupils nationally. This was particularly notable in the GCSE results in 2016. In some year groups, they are making better progress than other pupils in the school.
- Pupils are safe and well cared for. They are polite and show consideration and respect towards adults and each other. Leaders' efforts to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding are good.
- The majority of pupils behave well in most lessons and at social times. More recently, however, the number of fixed-term exclusions has increased.
- Pupils' attendance is above average. The numbers of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who are persistently absent are reducing.
- Students make good progress in the joint sixth form, especially in vocational courses. The progress they make in some academic qualifications, however, is not as rapid as it could be.
- Some students do not attend the joint sixth form as regularly as they should.
- Senior leaders are working more effectively with parents. This work is not yet sufficiently well developed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - senior and middle leaders develop their respective roles to include a strong focus on checking that the improvements they make are being sustained
 - senior leaders develop more effective ways of working with parents and involving them in pupils' learning, including through the use of homework.
- Improve the quality of teaching and eliminate the inconsistencies in pupils' learning by ensuring that teachers:
 - ask questions which help pupils explore their ideas in greater depth
 - insist on high-quality presentation of pupils' work
 - provide greater challenge for the most able pupils.
- Eliminate the remaining low-level disruption and reduce the number of pupils excluded from the school by ensuring that all staff apply the new behaviour systems consistently.
- Increase the number of students in the sixth form who achieve A-level qualifications or their equivalent by ensuring that senior leaders:
 - track and analyse learners' attainment and progress more effectively so that they can quickly identify the learners who are at risk of falling behind
 - improve students' attendance further.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The executive principal and academy director have high expectations and aspirations for the pupils who attend Retford Oaks. They have taken decisive action to transform the culture and ethos of the school since the last inspection. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, based on detailed analysis of how well pupils achieve and how their attainment and progress compare with national averages. They use this information well to set out a clear path for improvement. Senior leaders share their vision with other staff, and the vast majority of staff fully support this vision.
- Members of the academy trust and the governing body play an instrumental role in bringing about improvements in the school. Governors and trustees are highly effective in holding leaders to account to ensure that pupils make good progress.
- Senior leaders are committed to raising pupils' aspirations of what they can achieve. They are keen to improve pupils' life chances and are keen to provide pupils with a curriculum that is well suited to their needs. The curriculum prepares them well for GCSE examinations and for pupils' next stage in education, employment or training.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of British values are good. A well-planned programme presents pupils with numerous opportunities to take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- The executive principal, academy director and governing body ensure that leaders and all staff are held effectively to account for securing continued improvements in pupils' achievement. They manage teachers' performance well. This has resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and in pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders at all levels have established effective ways to improve their areas of responsibility. They have well-defined procedures to measure the differences their actions make on improving pupils' progress. However, several recently appointed leaders have not yet had the time needed to have the required impact.
- Checks on the quality of teaching are rigorous. Teachers receive high-quality training and gain opportunities to share best practice. Staff said that they appreciate the professional development opportunities they receive.
- Leaders provide newly qualified teachers and those still in training with a strong knowledge and experience base and help them to develop the skills they require to be successful teachers.
- Senior leaders use assessment systems comprehensively to measure the progress different groups of pupils make. They work closely with other organisations, through the academy trust and teaching partnerships, to ensure that what they measure and record is accurate and reliable. The school's current assessment information indicates that most pupils are making good progress.
- Senior leaders use additional funding effectively to support disadvantaged pupils, and many disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress. This is equally true for pupils who

have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Leaders also make effective use of the catch-up funding for pupils who have entered Year 7 with low attainment, to help them develop and sustain their skills in order that they can access the next stage in their learning.

- Leaders are improving the way they work with parents and carers. Some parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey (Parent View) believe that communication between school leaders and parents is not effective enough. Leaders acknowledge this, and actions to remedy the situation are at an early stage of development.
- Homework does not provide a positive contribution to pupils' learning. Pupils and parents, through discussions and surveys, share this view. Leaders are now working to tackle this.

Governance of the school

- Governors are ambitious for the pupils who attend the school. They provide school leaders with purposeful and timely challenge and appropriate support.
- Governors develop their knowledge, understanding and skills through a pertinent programme of training which ensures that they carry out their respective roles effectively. They have a good understanding of the different areas of the school's effectiveness.
- Governors gather information first-hand from pupils, parents and staff through discussions, surveys and visits to the school. They have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The governing body is accountable to the academy trust, and reporting procedures are thorough. Governors closely monitor the funding for targeted groups of pupils and make sure that it is used effectively to support eligible pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has a strong ethos of safeguarding. High-quality checks are in place to ensure the suitability of staff and volunteers. All policies, including the school safeguarding policy, are up to date.
- The designated teacher for child protection and safeguarding ensures that procedures are robust. The school works closely with a wide range of other agencies, and the records that the school keeps are highly detailed. Staff receive training in the latest guidance and understand the correct procedures they should follow, including those associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe in the school and that they know adults support them. The curriculum is effective in helping raise pupils' awareness of safe practices, including the safe use of technology. A very large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey and the school's own surveys agree that their children are safe and well cared for.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders have worked successfully to tackle the weaknesses in teaching identified at the last inspection, and the quality of teaching is now good.
- Teachers use strong subject knowledge to motivate pupils. Pupils in turn use this newly gained subject knowledge confidently to demonstrate what they have understood.
- Teachers use effective modelling to help pupils grasp their learning quickly. Pupils in Year 7, for example, quickly understood how to balance chemical equations because of the imaginative modelling used by their science teacher.
- Teachers' detailed planning and additional adult support are effective in helping pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. For example, resources were appropriately adapted during an English lesson so that all pupils in Year 9 could take part in the same activity.
- A range of effective support programmes provide disadvantaged pupils with the additional help they need to overcome any barriers they may have to learning. The majority of disadvantaged pupils make good progress in their lessons.
- Teachers use detailed assessment information to plan activities for pupils with different academic abilities to increase their knowledge and develop their skills. For example, in English, pupils in Year 8 with different abilities were encouraged to use language at different degrees of complexity to dissect a piece of written text. Sometimes, however, teaching is not sufficiently challenging for the most able pupils.
- Teachers often ask questions that stimulate pupils' thinking. Pupils are keen to ask questions of teachers to clarify and extend their own knowledge and understanding. Teachers also use questions effectively to tackle any misconceptions that the pupils may have. Sometimes, however, teachers do not probe deeply enough to encourage answers that develop pupils' higher-order thinking skills and extend their understanding.
- Staff have high expectations of pupils, and pupils' attitudes towards their learning are typically positive. Most pupils are keen learners, work with enthusiasm and take pride in their work. Not enough teachers, however, routinely challenge the presentation of pupils' work when it falls below the expected standard.
- Teachers make good use of opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills in a range of different subjects. This is especially true for spelling. A similar approach for developing pupils' numeracy skills, although planned, is not fully in place yet.
- Senior leaders provide parents with accurate information about how well their child is making progress. Some parents have indicated, however, through the school's own surveys and Ofsted's online survey, that they would like clearer and more timely information on how well their children are doing. Leaders have acknowledged this and are beginning to take action to remedy the situation.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Leaders make sure that pupils are safe and well cared for. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and fit. A very large majority of parents who responded to the surveys agreed that their children are safe and are well cared for. Pupils also shared this view.
- Pupils' British values are strengthened by their involvement in a range of motivating activities. For example, pupils take an active lead in the Nottinghamshire Poppy Appeal, attend and discuss talks on Islamophobia and take part in a citizenship summer school. The school is also committed to the Investors in Pupils programme. There is a strong sense of fairness and tolerance throughout the school.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils engage in a variety of extra-curricular activities, including drama productions and sporting clubs. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles, such as house leaders, and hold other responsibilities. Pupils are also encouraged to make presentations to the governing body.
- Leaders keep accurate records of bullying incidents, which show that occurrences of bullying are rare. Pupils, through discussions with inspectors and through the school's own pupil surveys, agreed that bullying incidents were uncommon.
- Pupils have access to effective careers education, advice and guidance to support them in making important decisions about their options and next stages of their education, training or employment.
- Pupils are confident and respectful towards adults and each other. They know that they are part of a community and take pride in the contribution they make. A small number of pupils, however, have yet to become fully engaged in their learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are polite and welcoming, and their conduct during social times is also good. They move around the site in a calm and considerate manner.
- Pupils are typically punctual and engage positively in their learning. This contributes to the good progress they make. Occasionally, pupils are not fully engaged in their learning and staff do not consistently make effective use of the school's behaviour policy to tackle this. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that behaviour has improved. Surveys indicate that parents believe that behaviour is improving. Leaders' work with parents, however, to increase their confidence in how the school is tackling the remaining disruptions to learning has not been sufficiently effective.
- Pupils' attendance is above average. Leaders are working hard to increase the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Although there have been improvements, the number of pupils who

do not attend as often as they should is above national averages for these groups of pupils.

- The number of fixed-term exclusions has increased over the last year.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' achievement has increased since the last inspection. In 2016, pupils leaving Year 11 made good progress from their starting points in a range of subjects, including mathematics, science and languages. Progress in English dipped. The school's assessment systems and pupils' workbooks show that current pupils continue to make good progress, including in English.
- The school has a very small number of pupils who receive their education with alternative providers. Leaders work in close partnership with these providers and effectively check the quality of provision and the standards reached by the pupils who attend them. Records show that pupils attending these courses attend well and make improvements to their behaviour. They make good progress in their respective courses from their different starting points.
- Pupils leave the school well prepared for their next stages of education, training or employment. They receive independent careers advice and a good range of information about their next options. All pupils move on to further education, training or employment.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective support. They make good progress, and in some year groups their progress is faster than that of their peers.
- In 2016, at the end of key stage 4, disadvantaged pupils made good progress compared with other pupils nationally and with other pupils in the school. The most recent information indicates that disadvantaged pupils will make similarly good progress in their 2017 key stage 4 examinations.
- Pupils typically enter the school with attainment well below the national average. Some pupils in Year 7 receive additional funding to help them improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and they make good progress, particularly in reading.
- In 2016, the progress of the most able pupils in Year 11, including those who are disadvantaged, was not as fast as that of pupils who entered the school with lower attainment. This was particularly true in English and in mathematics. The school's assessment data indicates that the most able pupils currently in the school make more rapid progress, including in English and in mathematics. This is an area of focus for school leaders.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Leaders have successfully improved the quality of the provision and have secured higher standards in the sixth form since the last inspection.

- All students have appropriate study programmes. This includes a relevant curriculum offer using partnership work and external collaboration with other organisations. All students take part in relevant work experience.
- Effective activities are in place to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Students benefit from taking on roles of responsibility, for example by taking school assemblies. Their skills are also developed through a range of additional activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, citizenship projects, creative writing and British Sign Language courses.
- The new head of sixth form makes sure that all students receive advice and guidance so that they can follow the most suitable course, based on their prior attainment and their career ambitions. Students who spoke with the inspectors said that the advice they receive has improved and that they appreciate this. The number of pupils who join the sixth form from Year 11, although low, is increasing as leaders extend the provision they offer. The number of students who remain on their courses from Year 12 to Year 13 is high. The number of students who move on to sustained education, training or employment is above the national average.
- Work undertaken by leaders to improve the quality of teaching has ensured that teaching is good in the sixth form. Teachers plan lessons which challenge students and help them to develop a wide range of skills. Relationships between teachers and students are positive and respectful, and this contributes to the good progress students make.
- A small number of students enter the sixth form without attaining a grade C or above in English or mathematics. In 2016, these students made excellent progress and all went on to achieve a GCSE grade C in English and in mathematics. This exceptional performance has continued for students currently in the sixth form.
- In 2016, students made good progress in their applied qualifications and AS level qualifications. However, their progress in A-level courses was below the national average. The school's assessment systems indicate that leaders expect improvements in all qualification types this year.
- Historically, the most able students have not made fast enough progress to achieve the standards they should. Current assessment information suggests that the most able students are now making more rapid progress and achieving higher standards. Students are now making faster progress in subjects where it has previously been slow, such as in English literature, mathematics and sociology. The rate of this improvement, however, remains slower than it should be.
- Students know how to stay safe. Leaders and teachers effectively safeguard their mental health and well-being. Their uptake of sporting activities is high. Students' behaviour is good and there is a culture of mutual respect and tolerance in the sixth form.
- Leaders have recently introduced checks on students' punctuality and this is now improving. Levels of attendance are improving but remain low.
- Leaders provide students with highly individualised support that enables them to achieve well. However, leaders do not have a sufficiently well-established system for

tracking students' progress so that they can quickly identify those students who are at risk of falling behind.

School details

Unique reference number	137117
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	10031175

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	816
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	62
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mike Quigley
Principal	Dave Cotton (executive principal) Heather Widdup (academy director)
Telephone number	01777 861618
Website	www.retfordoaks-ac.org.uk/
Email address	office@retfordoaks-ac.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 May 2015

Information about this school

- Retford Oaks is sponsored by the Diverse Academies Trust and is part of the Diverse Academies Learning Partnership.
- Since the last inspection, the trust has appointed a new executive principal. The deputy headteacher at the time of the last inspection has been appointed as the academy director. Several new appointments have been made to the senior and middle leadership teams.

- Retford Oaks is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is very small.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is also below average.
- A few pupils are taught off-site. These pupils attend The Dukeries College, North Nottinghamshire College or The Ashvale Centre, all of which are registered providers.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- The sixth form is jointly managed by Retford Oaks Academy, the Elizabethan Academy and North Nottinghamshire College.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 33 lessons. Some of this learning was observed jointly with a senior leader.
- Discussions took place with school staff, members of the governing body and trustees.
- The inspectors met with three groups of pupils and talked with pupils informally at other times. Inspectors observed tutor time and social times and listened to pupils in Year 7 reading.
- The 74 responses to a survey completed by staff and the 45 responses submitted by parents to Ofsted's online survey (Parent View), including 28 free-text responses, were taken into account. Inspectors also reviewed the school's own surveys.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a broad range of evidence, including the school's analysis of its strengths and weaknesses; planning and monitoring documentation; the work in pupils' books; records relating to attendance and behaviour; and the school's own information on pupils' current attainment and progress in all subjects.
- The school's child protection and safeguarding procedures were scrutinised. A review of the school's website was made to check whether it met the requirements on the publication of required information.

Inspection team

Vondra Mays, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Ellenor Beighton	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Fulbrook	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Sammy	Ofsted Inspector

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