

Samuel Ryder Academy

Drakes Drive, St Albans, AL1 5AR

Inspection dates 30 April–1 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' progress is not yet consistently good across the school and in 2013 they did not attain as well as might be expected in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- The systems designed to track students' progress have not always been used to identify and support quickly enough the students who need extra help.
- The more-able students are not sufficiently challenged to achieve the higher grades.
- Boys make less progress than girls in English and writing-based subjects.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Though action has now been taken, there were weaknesses in the study programme students were offered last year. Some students chose inappropriate courses and this led to underachievement.
- The school has not done enough to ensure that supply staff who cover for absent teachers are effective.
- Teaching is not yet consistently good across all subjects and year groups. Teachers do not always match the work to students' ability, make sure students understand, use questioning effectively or use marking to help students improve their work.
- Leaders and governors have not yet ensured enough improvement in the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
- Subject leaders are not yet fully involved in monitoring students' progress and spreading good practice in teaching.
- There is still work to do in ensuring the confidence in the school of the large majority of potential parents in the local community.

The school has the following strengths

- The principal and senior leaders are taking action to tackle underachievement so that the school is on a well-planned journey of improvement.
- Achievement is good in the Reception and Year 1 classes.
- There is evidence of an increasing amount of good progress across the school this year.
- There have been considerable improvements in the behaviour and attendance of students. The behaviour of students is good and they feel safe and secure in the school.
- Most students are proud of the new academy and enjoy being at the school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 lessons, one of which was seen jointly with the assistant headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the principal, the Chair of the Governing Body, the principal of Sir John Lawes School, senior leaders, staff and groups of students.
- Inspectors took account of the 68 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire and the 56 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors examined a range of evidence, including the school's analysis of its own performance and resulting development plan, the systems to track students' progress, and records relating to behaviour and attendance. They also looked at records of lesson observations by senior leaders, staff performance information, safeguarding documentation and a sample of students' work.

Inspection team

Stephen Walker, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lesley Kirby	Additional Inspector
Helen Bailey	Additional Inspector
Simon Hughes	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Samuel Ryder Academy opened in September 2012, sponsored by the Sir John Lawes Academies Trust. Most students currently in Years 9 to 13 attended a school on the same site that closed in August 2012, and which had been judged by Ofsted to require significant improvement.
- The school is smaller than the average all-through school for pupils aged between 4 to 19 years.
- Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is organised through the Reception classes. There are students in Year 1 and Years 7 to 13 although there are no students at the moment in Years 2 to 6.
- The school has a small sixth form and is part of the Alban Learning Partnership which is the sixth form consortium for St Albans secondary schools. A small number of students attend another consortium school for one of their advanced level courses.
- The school does not make use of any other alternative provision for its students in Key Stage 4.
- The school is housed mainly in post-war buildings which have been extensively refurbished and extended. There are a number of recently constructed buildings including a purpose built swimming pool and classrooms for the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary students. The school has extensive grounds and playing fields.
- The majority of students are from White British backgrounds although the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is also above average.
- An above average proportion of students are supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportions of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action is above average although the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching is good or better by making sure that teachers:
 - use questioning more effectively to engage students, confirm their understanding and challenge them in their learning
 - plan and adjust work in lessons so that it is at the right level for all students
 - make sure students understand what they must do in lessons
 - use marking regularly to show students how to improve their work and gain the higher grades.
- Make sure that more students are making good or better progress in GCSE and sixth form examinations by:
 - ensuring that all students at risk of underachieving and not making the progress they should get effective support
 - making sure the more-able students are supported to achieve the higher grades in their examinations
 - developing strategies to accelerate the progress of boys, particularly in English and literacy-based subjects.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers by:

- ensuring that subject leaders are fully involved in monitoring students’ progress across the school and providing support in classrooms to improve the quality of teaching
 - providing consistently good support for supply teachers
 - building on the growing confidence of parents and the local community so that numbers of students continue to rise.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students' achievement requires improvement because their progress is not consistently good across the school and they have not attained as well as might be expected in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Although there are clear signs of better progress this year, this has been insufficient to compensate fully for underachievement in the first year the school was open or to demonstrate sustained good progress. However, teacher assessments indicate that the majority of students who started in the new school in the Reception and Year 7 classes are consistently making good progress.
- Standards at GCSE in 2013 were not high enough in all subjects to demonstrate good progress. Although most of these Year 11 students joined the school in September 2012 having underachieved in the previous school, they did not make the progress necessary to catch up in 2012-13. Teaching was too variable so not enough students made the progress they should from their starting points.
- Progress in the sixth form requires improvement because not enough students have made good or better progress in their AS and A level subjects. Although achievement is overall adequate there was underachievement in a number of AS subjects last year because some students selected inappropriate courses.
- Teachers have not always identified underachieving students quickly enough, or given them fully effective additional support. The school is now making greater use of the systems for tracking students' progress and providing better support for underachieving students. The school is presently addressing the progress of less-able students in Year 7 and 8 effectively, through the 'catch-up' programme. Initially, attainment targets were not sufficiently challenging to support good progress although teachers are now setting higher expectations for their students.
- The school identifies that more-able students are not being sufficiently challenged to achieve higher grades particularly in GCSE and the sixth form. Progress information indicates that boys are doing less well than girls in English and literacy-based subjects. The school can show evidence that the single-gender English groups in Year 10 are leading to better progress for boys during the present year.
- Most disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with their peers. Too many students underachieved last year because they were not sufficiently supported. More students are making good progress this year due to the effective work from teaching assistants which help them overcome barriers to learning. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language made similar progress to the other students last year and tracking records suggest that the majority of these students are achieving well in their present classes.
- Progress records for the Reception classes show these students consistently make good progress. Structured activities and the good use of the inside and outside resources are having a positive impact on students' personal development, as well as encouraging number and language skills. Year 1 students have continued their good start to school and are making good progress due to effective and supportive teaching by the teachers and teaching assistants. Students make good progress in reading and the school is effectively using a well-thought-out approach to teaching phonics (the sounds represented by letters) in the Reception and Year 1 classes.

- Tracking shows students are making better progress across the school this year. Data for the present Year 11 suggest that over 56% of students are on track to gain 5 A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics, which would represent good progress from their entry to the school. Data for the current year in AS and A level subjects also suggest that more students are on track to complete their courses and attain their target grades. Most students following courses in the other consortium schools are carefully tracked and are also in line to meet their predicted grades.
- The school has developed more positive attitudes to learning which are supporting better progress this year. English and mathematics have raised student expectations by introducing more structured courses and addressing weaker literacy and numeracy skills. Year 9 students are to be entered for GCSE information communication technology this year, to build their confidence in examinations. The school no longer enters students early for other GCSEs.
- The school is using pupil premium funding effectively to provide extra support in English and mathematics, to make sure the students involved progress as well or better than others. These students gained nearly the same GCSE grades as their classmates in English, and about half a grade lower in mathematics in 2013. Predictions for this year suggest a reduction in the attainment gap.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although there is an increasing amount of good or better teaching across the school, it is not yet consistently good enough. Evidence about progress provided by school data, by work in students' books, by discussion and by observations of pupils' learning show that teaching is not yet strong enough to lead to sustained good achievement.
- Not enough teachers use information about what students already know to set work at the right level for students' different abilities. Some students are not challenged enough because the work in lessons is sometimes too easy for them, while some are held back in their learning because the work is too hard and they need more guidance and support.
- Sometimes groups and individuals are not clear enough about the tasks in lessons and what they have to do to succeed. In a number of lessons, some students were not making as much progress as they could have done, because they were stuck and waiting for the teacher to help them with their work. Students made less progress in the lessons covered by supply teachers, either because they were not given sufficient support with their work or because expectations were too low.
- Not enough teachers are using questioning well to stretch all students in their learning and to check their understanding. The questions are too frequently targeted at a few students in the class who know the answers and do not challenge and extend the thinking of others. Some teachers give the students the answer too quickly and do not encourage them to think for themselves.
- The marking of work is inconsistent across the school and does not always provide enough guidance to students on how to improve their work and gain the higher grades. Although the marking of work is comprehensive in the English and primary classes, this is not replicated across the school.
- Teaching in the sixth form requires improvement because some students are not making enough

progress towards their target grades. However, the quality of teaching is improving and in many lessons, students are eager to answer questions, take a full part in the learning and review their progress. For example, Year 12 students made rapid progress in English as the teacher asked probing questions to ensure students to reflect on their work and knew exactly how to gain better marks.

- Teaching in the Reception and Year 1 classes is good and there are examples of good and outstanding teaching across the school. Students generally have good attitudes to learning and are eager to improve their work and grades. They behave well in classes and this provides a positive environment for learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. This contributes to a calm and orderly environment for learning. Parents, staff and students say older students' behaviour is better since they went to the new school. In lessons, the vast majority of students meet the school's expectations and, typically, respond well to teachers' good use of praise and encouragement to promote high standards of behaviour.
- There are clear expectations of behaviour and consistent systems to deal quickly with any misbehaviour. As a result, the number of detentions given to students has significantly decreased this year and exclusions are very rare. The occasional challenging behaviour from a very small number of students is dealt with well by teachers and is not allowed to disrupt the learning of the other students. Secondary students can be trusted to move around the corridors and socialise at break and lunchtime with a reasonable level of supervision.
- Senior students, including the sixth formers, embrace the opportunities to help the younger children. The regular assemblies greatly support the positive atmosphere in the school because they engage the students and foster commitment. Students are polite and courteous to staff and each other and this contributes well to their learning. They adhere to the uniform regulations and look after the school buildings and grounds.
- Bullying of any kind is rare in the school. Students say that staff deal quickly and effectively with any unkind behaviour, such as name-calling or unpleasant comments on social networking sites. Students promote an anti-bullying charter and secondary students are aware of the different forms of possible bullying, such as cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sex, gender, race and disability.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Governors make sure that the arrangements for safeguarding fully meet current national requirements and underpin the school's very caring approach. Students across the school feel safe and display a good understanding of the issues relating to safety. They talk confidently about how they would keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. Senior students confirmed that the school provides them with helpful information on sex education and the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drugs.
- Leaders have effective strategies to raise attendance and reduce persistent absence. Attendance was broadly average last year, and has risen this year. Most students enjoy being at school.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Although there is clear evidence that this is becoming a better school, there is still work to do in consolidating the recent improvements in students' progress and eliminating teaching which

requires improvement.

- The principal and senior leaders are providing strong leadership which has already brought improvement in behaviour and attendance, and in teaching. However, it has yet to sustain improvements long enough to raise teaching or students' progress to good levels.
- There has been a large turnover of middle leaders so many heads of department are newly appointed and have not had sufficient time to make a substantial impact on school improvements. Subject leaders are developing their supporting and monitoring roles, but are not yet sufficiently involved in sharing good practice in teaching or in coaching colleagues. The systems to support supply teachers are inconsistent across subjects, and students do not always make enough progress where systems are not secure.
- The new school opened with some very small year groups in Years 9 to 13 due to negative perceptions about the school previously on the site. The school acknowledges that the key challenge for the leadership is to build on the growing confidence of parents and local community so that there is a smooth transition towards a viable and effective all-through comprehensive school. The number of parents selecting the school for their children in Reception and Year 7 for September 2014 is promising which indicates an improving public image of the school, although there is still more work to be done to ensure a consistency in student numbers.
- The school is on a well-planned journey of improvement. The academy development plan is based on an accurate assessment of the school, and targets the right areas to lead to continuing improvements. The leaders have improved systems to strengthen the tracking of students' progress and the monitoring of teaching. This year teachers are more accountable for the progress of their students, and there is a comprehensive training programme for staff.
- The school provides a coherent programme for all students. A wide range of outside visits and extra-curricular activities increase students' enjoyment and experience of school. All these experiences contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The sixth form is well led and is improving rapidly. Prior to the school opening, some sixth form students had chosen AS-level courses that did not meet their needs, and underachieved in 2013 as a result. Leaders acted quickly to provide good guidance for students commencing courses in 2013. As a result, more students are remaining on their courses.
- There are strong links with Sir John Lawes School, which has worked closely with the principal and governors to implement a plan for improvement. It has been active in providing training and support for leaders and teachers so that the school has been able to tackle some of the previous weaknesses in teaching and students' progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Its members are involved in monitoring progress and holding leaders and staff to account. The principal ensures that governors have a good understanding about the quality of teaching and about students' achievement in relation to other similar schools. This allows them to make confident decisions on salary progression.
 - Governors have effectively overseen the use of the pupil premium funding and ensured that it is spent only on supporting eligible students. The school has not yet received any primary sports funding.
 - Governors are developing their roles and are highly aware of the need to monitor the effectiveness of key actions and initiatives to ensure they are quickly leading to improvements

in teaching and achievement.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138582
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	440095

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	424
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Braham
Principal	Matthew Gauthier
Date of previous school inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01727 859382
Fax number	01727 810199
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