

Mount Grace School

Church Road, Potters Bar, EN6 1EZ

Inspection dates 14–15 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Not enough students attain five good GCSEs including English and mathematics.
- The progress made in some subjects by a minority of students, especially the most able, disadvantaged and disabled students and those who have special educational needs, is lower than found nationally.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. It does not always ensure that all groups of students are given work that is well- suited to their abilities and challenges them to achieve well.
- Teachers do not always question students well enough to help them deepen their understanding.
- Occasionally, the quality of marking and feedback is not strong enough to help students improve their work and make good progress.
- Teachers do not always plan and prepare suitable activities to ensure that all disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress.
- The sixth form requires improvement as the quality of teaching has not ensured that enough pupils make good progress in Years 12 and 13.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have markedly raised expectations for students and for staff. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving, especially in English and science.
- Governance has improved. Governors check the work of the school regularly. They challenge leaders to improve all aspects of the school's work.
- Progress in mathematics, graphic design, resistant materials, physics and French is good.
- School data and work in books indicate that students' achievement in all subjects is on course to rise in 2015. This is because leaders successfully check and evaluate the impact of teaching on students' achievement.
- Students who attend alternative provision are well cared for and achieve well.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and rates of attendance have increased.
- Students feel safe in school and know how to keep themselves safe in different situations.
- The many enrichment activities, visits and visitors, promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 28 lessons. Some of these observations were shared with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors spoke to students during lessons and looked closely at their books.
- Inspectors met four groups of students, and spoke informally to other students in lessons and during breaks and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school. They examined several documents concerning students' achievement and progress, development plans and information about teachers' performance. They also looked at records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. Minutes of governing body meetings were considered.
- Inspectors considered the 110 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors considered the 60 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Alison Dominey	Additional Inspector
Alison Wilshaw	Additional Inspector
Susan Bullen	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Mount Grace is an average-sized secondary school.
- The large majority of students come from White British backgrounds.
- The pupil premium (additional government funding which supports students known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) provides support for one in every four of the students. This is similar to the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is about one in three. This proportion is well above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of students attend part-time alternative provision at Oaklands College, St Albans, which allows them to attend courses in construction, animal care, child care and motor repair, or at Capol Manor, Enfield, which allows them to attend a course in horticulture.
- Some aspects of the post-16 curriculum are taught in partnership with Chancellor's School.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a large turnover of staff. A number of new senior leaders, heads of faculty and subject leaders were appointed in September 2013 and 2014. The current acting head of the sixth form took up his post in September 2014. There are currently a number of teachers employed on short term contracts to cover maternity leave and some long-term sickness.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching across the key stages, including the sixth form so that all groups of students achieve well by ensuring that:
 - teachers always plan activities that will enable all disabled students and those who have special educational needs to make consistently good progress
 - expectations of what students can achieve, especially the most-able, are always high and that students are given work that challenges them to reach the highest grades of which they are capable
 - questioning always helps students deepen their knowledge and understanding
 - students consistently receive good-quality marking and feedback that tells them clearly how well they have done and what they need to do to improve.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and new leaders have set high expectations for students and staff. There is now a culture of good behaviour and students want to succeed. With a sharp focus on improving teaching to raise achievement, leaders are ensuring that the quality of teaching across the subjects is improving at an effective rate but has yet to have its full impact on students' attainment.
- Senior leaders have introduced rigorous systems for frequently checking on the quality of teaching and holding teachers to account for their performance. Findings are used well to identify training needs for individual members of staff to help them to improve. Teachers benefit from coaching and mentoring, training by external experts and working with colleagues in other schools. Improved teaching is therefore leading to rising standards, markedly so in English and science.
- The new director of students' services and heads of learning introduced a new behaviour policy and processes for rewards and sanctions. This has resulted in improved behaviour and higher rates of attendance since the previous inspection.
- Heads of faculty and subject leaders regularly review the effectiveness of their areas of responsibility. Resulting action plans are helping to improve teaching and achievement well. A few of the new and less-experienced leaders are being well trained by senior leaders to develop fully the leadership skills to accurately check on the quality of teaching and to rigorously hold their colleagues to account for the progress of their students.
- Leaders spend the pupil premium funding to provide disadvantaged students with additional teaching support and experiences, such as overseas trips. This is having some positive impact on closing achievement gaps. Leaders have recently reviewed their work in this area and have planned additional actions to help close the remaining achievement gaps.
- Discrimination is not tolerated. New systems for checking on the progress of all students and providing any underachievers with additional support is helping leaders ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- The range of subjects on offer provides students with courses which meet their personal interests as well as their academic and work-related needs. Good careers guidance from Year 7 onwards, work experience opportunities and links with the University of Hertfordshire ensure that almost all students go on to further education, training or employment.
- Students have access to a wide range of enrichment activities, including in sport and performing arts. They learn about various faiths and cultures and have opportunities to hear a range of speakers on a variety of topics and to debate current affairs. Students have opportunities to take on leadership roles and they raise funds for students at the partner school in Zambia. These opportunities demonstrate that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted and that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders check closely the progress, attendance and behaviour of those students accessing off-site provision. As a result, those students learn well and achieve accreditation in their chosen courses.
- The arrangements for safeguarding meet current requirements. Staff and visitors are appropriately vetted and this ensures that students and staff are safe.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved considerably since the time of the previous inspection. Governors now understand student performance information well because of the good training they have received. They are well informed about the quality of teaching, and link governors visit the school to directly check on its work. As a result, the governing body both challenges and supports leaders to improve the quality of teaching, achievement and behaviour.

- Governors have supported the school well in implementing robust performance management systems. Only the most successful teachers are rewarded and those needing help are well supported to improve. Appropriate actions are taken when performance still fails to improve.
- Governors fulfil all of their statutory duties well and deploy resources effectively. For example, they recently approved the appointment of additional lead teachers in science to help address the legacy of underperformance. Inspection evidence confirms that the quality of teaching and students' progress have improved considerably since the start of this academic year.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They are polite and welcoming to visitors. Students arrive punctually to school and to lessons and readily respond to their teachers' instructions. Most students are eager to learn and these positive attitudes are helping them to make better progress.
- Students worked with staff to produce the 'Mount Grace Standards' setting out agreed expectations for behaviour, including for respecting all others, and standards for presenting work and completing homework. Students are aware of the reward and sanction systems which they say are applied consistently by staff. As a result, behaviour has improved considerably since the time of the previous inspection.
- The school works well with students and their families to support those having difficulties with behaviour and attendance. Attendance has therefore increased and exclusions have reduced.
- On the odd occasion, a few students go off task and engage in low-level disruption. Teachers intervene to good effect. They use the behaviour management procedures well to ensure students are soon back on track.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The vast majority of parents who responded to the Parent View survey agree that the school ensures that their children are safe.
- Students know how to keep themselves safe in different situations through a programme of lessons, assemblies and discussions during tutor time. They are very well aware, for instance, of how to protect themselves from the dangers of social media.
- Students are aware of all types of bullying. Students are clear that people of different faiths, cultures and sexual orientation are to be respected equally. They say that instances of bullying have reduced considerably and, on the rare occasion that it does occur, staff deal with bullying effectively.
- The behaviour and safety of students on courses away from school are good. This is because those students travel together by transport provided by the school accompanied by a member of the school's staff. Leaders have frequent communication with the providers to check attendance and the safety of equipment used in the courses.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, over time, it has not ensured that students across the school and in all subjects attain the standards that they could. Although it has been improving at an effective rate during the past year and much is good, there are still some remaining inconsistencies.
- Some teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what all groups of students can achieve. As a result, the work set is not constantly well targeted to support those having difficulties, such as those disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and disadvantaged students, to make consistently good progress.

- Work provided for the most-able students is not always difficult enough to make sure that they reach the highest grades of which they are capable.
- Teachers do not always question students well enough to make them think deeply, express their views clearly and justify their responses. This impedes their achievement.
- The recently introduced marking and feedback policy, which requires teachers to tell students clearly how well they are doing, what they need to do to improve and includes specific follow up actions is making a good contribution to helping students raise their achievement. However, the policy is not applied consistently by all teachers.
- The teaching of literacy over time has not been effective enough to ensure that students make good progress and achieve well, including in the sixth form. Inspection evidence shows that, with the recent staff changes, teaching in English is improving rapidly and many more students are now making quicker progress. Similarly, this is the case in other subjects, particularly science.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved considerably since the time of the previous inspection. As a result, students now make faster progress in this subject to reach broadly average standards.
- The work in current students' books indicates that the quality of teaching is better than it has been in the past. In all subjects and across all year groups, including the sixth form, students are making faster progress.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The proportion of students attaining five good GCSE's including English and mathematics over time has been below average. The gaps compared to the national average narrowed in 2014, though standards remained lower than average.
- The proportion of students making expected progress in English rose well in 2014 compared to the previous year but was still below average. Inspection evidence shows that current students are making faster progress. Progress in mathematics has risen over the past three years and, in 2014, the proportions making expected progress was higher than the national average.
- Many of the most-able students do not achieve as well as they could. The proportion attaining A* and A grades is relatively low in almost all subjects. This is because teachers do not always set work that is hard enough.
- The progress that disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium make, although improving steadily, has not ensured that they close the attainment gaps with their peers. This is because teaching and support is not always planned well enough to meet their individual learning needs. Leaders have made it a priority this year to review and improve provision for these students and early indications are that they are beginning to make more rapid progress.
- In 2014, disadvantaged students attained about three quarters of a GCSE grade lower in English and a GCSE grade-and-a-quarter lower in mathematics, than other students in the school. They gained a GCSE grade lower in English and almost one-and-a-third GCSE grades lower in mathematics, than students nationally.
- The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs requires improvement. This is because teachers are not always planning for their individual needs to help them make consistently good progress and teaching assistants do not always give them well-targeted support.
- The school no longer enters students early for GCSE examinations. This gives students the opportunity to consolidate their learning and skills until the end of Year 11.

- Students who are educated off-site achieve well. In 2014, all passed their respective work-related courses.
- Standards are improving in a number of subjects. Students made good progress and attained broadly average standards in mathematics, graphic products, French and work-related subjects in 2014. Inspection evidence, including reviewing students' work and the school's own data, show that current students are making faster progress and are on track to attain higher standards in 2015. This improvement is sustained across all subjects and year groups, including the sixth form.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Students entering the sixth form and taking AS and A level courses have lower than average prior attainment at GCSE. Although attainment improved in 2014, the overall progress that students made from their starting points was still below that found nationally. As a result, achievement in the sixth form requires improvement.
- Those taking work-related courses however, have higher than average prior attainment. In most of these courses, students make good progress from their starting points.
- Teaching over time in the sixth form has been too variable to ensure that students make good progress across all subjects, especially at AS and A level. Like the rest of the school, teaching in the sixth form is now improving at a faster rate.
- Students are offered a wide range of academic and vocational options either on-site or at the partnership school. Students value the wide range of pathways offered to them and the good impartial advice that they receive about their courses and post-schooling options. As a result, the numbers staying on from Year 11 and entering the sixth rose last year and the proportion continuing from Year 12 to 13 is above national average.
- Through tutorials, assemblies, visitors and visits, as well as organised work experience, students develop their employability skills well.
- Behaviour and safety of students are good. Students show good attitudes to learning and act as good role models as well as mentors to younger students. They make a strong contribution to the school and wider community; for example, by providing sports leadership to local primary schools. The Senior Prefect Team represents students' views and shares their ideas with the headteacher and, on occasion, attends meetings of the governing body.
- The new leadership team in the sixth form has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They have devised effective plans to more closely check on the quality of teaching and students' progress. Any underachieving students are given additional support. Leaders' drive for improvements include making sure that there is a closer liaison now between sixth form and subject leaders to ensure that any concerns in the quality of teaching or students' achievement are addressed in a timely fashion.

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	137224
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	453654

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	857
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	157
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colin Daniel
Headteacher	Peter Baker
Date of previous school inspection	23 January 2013
Telephone number	01707 655512
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