

The Pinetree School

Staniforth Road, Thetford, IP24 3LH

Inspection dates 8–9 July 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Inadequate 4
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Over time, leaders, managers and governors have failed to tackle serious and routine misbehaviour at the school. Expectations of what students can achieve have been low, and many have missed significant amounts of teaching in one or more key subjects.
- Leaders and managers have not had an accurate view of the impact of the school's work because until very recently, monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning have all been inadequate. Governors have had insufficient information with which to hold leaders to account.
- Teachers have not been held accountable for the progress their students make because there has been no system in place to monitor, manage and help them to improve their performance.
- Aspects of the school's work to keep students safe and secure are inadequate. Many students do not attend school regularly enough.
- Teachers have not accurately assessed what students know and can do when they join the school. This has prevented them from setting students appropriate targets and from planning learning that meets students' needs.
- Teachers do not always respond effectively when students lose focus or disrupt the learning of others. This slows the pace of learning, often considerably.
- Marking and assessment are not good enough. Leaders have not ensured that marking is regular and accurate, and so teachers are not always aware of gaps in students' knowledge and understanding or how to fill these gaps.
- The feedback given to students often does not give them precise, subject-specific guidance about how they can improve their work. Many continue to make the same mistakes as a result.
- Not all teachers help students to develop their literacy skills, which are often low. This limits students' ability to communicate their ideas clearly, and to understand what it is that they need to do in order to answer questions fully.
- Students' achievement over time has been inadequate. This is particularly true for those students currently in Year 11.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed interim headteacher, supported by the executive headteacher and members of the interim executive board, has acted quickly to raise standards. Staff share her vision and are working together determinedly in order to start making the necessary changes.
- Teachers are beginning to plan more effectively, and timetable changes mean all students can now study the core subjects in the curriculum.
- Many parents appreciate the improvements that have begun, particularly regarding behaviour. Leaders and teachers are communicating effectively with parents and helping them to support their children's learning.
- Leaders and staff from other schools within the Engage Trust are starting to offer staff effective training and support, which is helping to make a positive difference to aspects of the school's work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons and parts of lessons, as well as learning during tutor time. They looked at students' work and spoke to them about their learning and their time at the school.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the interim headteacher and other senior and subject leaders, the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and other governors.
- Telephone conversations were held with the school's education adviser from the Department for Education and a representative of the local authority.
- An inspector met with a group of students to talk about their behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation including assessment information, improvement planning, evidence from leaders' and governors' monitoring, minutes of Interim Executive Board meetings, safeguarding information and behaviour logs.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, for inspectors to take these into account. However, they spoke with a number of parents and considered the school's own records of parents' views. They also took account of the 11 staff responses to the Ofsted questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jason Howard, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mary Rayner

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- The Pinetree School, previously the Thetford Alternative Provision Free School, was established in September 2013 as an alternative provision free school to provide education for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 who have been excluded, or who are at risk of exclusion, from their mainstream schools. Norfolk local authority has purchased approximately half of the available places at the school.
- Although an academy free school, leaders refer to Pinetree as a school, as does this inspection report.
- This is a small school, with the capacity to educate 40 students. Thirty-one students are currently on roll.
- The school has been part of the Engage Trust, a multi-academy trust that sponsors special and alternative provision academies in the East of England, since March 2015. The chief executive officer of the Trust is providing support for the interim headteacher, who took up her post in March 2015.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage; the overwhelming majority are boys.
- The majority of students on roll have special educational needs; the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs is significantly above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for the pupil premium is significantly above average, but the school does not receive any of the funding as this is retained by the students' previous settings or named schools.
- The school uses a number of external providers to enhance provision for students. These include St Edmunds, Thetford Excel, Engage Norfolk Ltd and Appleseed.
- There was no data relating to government floor standards in 2014 because students' attainment was reported in the mainstream schools where they were first registered.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve the safeguarding of all students by ensuring that:
 - all of the safer recruitment checks required by law are completed and recorded on the school's single central record
 - the school site is safe and that all health and safety requirements are met
 - the use of locked doors as a behaviour management tool is reviewed, and staff develop students' ability to manage their own behaviour around the school site
 - procedures to tackle persistent absence are used robustly so that attendance increases
 - risk-assessment procedures relating to all off-site trips and visits are in place.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders, managers and governors by ensuring that:
 - all aspects of the school's work are evaluated thoroughly, that detailed improvement plans are put in place, and that leaders and governors monitor their implementation rigorously
 - all statutory policies and procedures are in place, up-to-date and reflected in day-to-day practice
 - students' emotional and health needs, together with the extent of their prior knowledge, understanding and skills, are assessed carefully when they join the school and that this information is used to plan their learning
 - systematic checks on the behaviour and progress of students undertaking off-site alternative provision take place
 - the quality of teaching, and the suitability and accuracy of assessment, are monitored carefully and that this information is used to assess the impact of teaching on students' progress
 - systems are put in place that manage the performance of staff, and ensure their appropriate professional development
 - all leaders have the knowledge and skills they need to drive improvement within their areas of

responsibility, drawing further upon the resources of the Trust in order to build leadership capacity.

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise students' achievement by ensuring that teachers in all subjects:
 - have high expectations of students' behaviour and respond effectively to instances of disruption
 - encourage high expectations by putting in place aspirational targets for students that are appropriate to their starting points
 - establish the gaps in students' knowledge and understanding caused by previous weaknesses in teaching, and provide appropriate support in order to fill them
 - use their understanding of what students know and can do to plan engaging activities that are suitably challenging, so that students can take the next steps in their learning
 - provide regular and precise subject-specific feedback that makes clear to students what they need to do to improve their work, and ensure that they make the necessary changes
 - help those students with low levels of literacy so that they can read and write well
 - observe the good practice that exists within the school, particularly in mathematics and in science, and benefit from high quality training.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leaders and governors have not ensured that students' behaviour and attendance have been managed effectively. The quality of the curriculum, and of teaching, has been inadequate. Leaders have not monitored standards effectively and, until recently, many of the policies and procedures to support students' progress and ensure their safety have not been in place. As a result, many students have made very slow progress and achieved little.
- The recently-appointed interim headteacher has quickly gained an appreciation of the school's most urgent priorities for improvement and has started to tackle these in a determined manner. Staff are responding positively to the changes, and behaviour at the school is improving. However, significant challenges remain; the capacity of middle and other leaders to drive improvement is limited. In part this reflects a longer-term lack of support and training for staff who have had limited previous experience in their current areas of responsibility.
- Longer-term development plans are not fully in place because recently-appointed leaders have been preoccupied with some of the most immediate priorities for the school's improvement. The existing plan for 2015-16 is not precise enough about how objectives will be met, and within what timescales. Arrangements for monitoring progress towards the plan's objectives and evaluating the extent of progress are unclear.
- Leaders have not acted to promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations. Until recent timetable changes, many students have not been able to study all of the core subjects in the school's curriculum. Relations between students, and between students and staff, were poor because expectations about students' conduct were too low. Serious classroom disruption has often prevented those who wanted to learn from doing so.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding do not meet statutory requirements. Policies and procedures do not reflect current guidance and not all safer recruitment checks are in place. All staff have completed safeguarding training, however, and issues of concern that arise are followed up in a timely and effective manner.
- Leaders are beginning to evaluate the impact of aspects of the school's work on the quality of education that students receive. However, in the past students' starting points were not assessed when they joined the school. Systems are not fully in place to check the accuracy of marks or grades applied to students' work, or the suitability of key assessment tasks. Therefore leaders have not got the information they need to be able to challenge teachers when students underachieve.
- Systems to review the performance of teachers and support staff have not been in place. Leaders have started to set clear expectations so that teachers now know what is expected of them. They are organising training to help teachers develop their skills, but over time the extent of such support has been very limited. This is, in turn, limiting the pace at which the quality of teaching improves.
- Until very recently, the curriculum has failed to meet the needs of all students, because timetabling has not ensured that all study each subject within the school's core curriculum. This has had a particularly detrimental impact upon the progress made by those currently in Year 11, and has undermined the school's careful work to ensure that all students benefit from their high quality careers education and are able to secure the training, further education or employment offers they receive.
- The school's promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education has improved, as higher expectations concerning behaviour have enabled students to understand the need for rules and the responsibilities that come with being part of a community. Leaders are starting to promote British values; teachers are encouraging discussion and debate about topical issues during tutor time, and students are now able to make a difference to the school community through membership of the student council. Some contribute to the wider community by selling produce they have grown in the school garden and donating the proceeds to charity. Opportunities to promote students' spiritual development are more limited.

- Leaders monitor carefully the attendance of students who attend alternative provision, but checks on their progress and behaviour are less systematic.
- The interim headteacher has greatly improved the school's communication with parents, many of whom appreciate the changes that have begun.
- The local authority, which purchases places at the school, has done too little over time to monitor the standard of education provided or to check that students are safe and secure.
- The chief executive officer of the Engage Trust has provided two days of support to the interim headteacher each week. This has helped to increase the impact of early changes, including those that have raised expectations about behaviour. Leaders at other schools within the Trust have provided some initial useful advice about ways in which to monitor students' progress, and subject-specific guidance to support the English subject leader.
- Inspectors strongly recommend that, as an academy, the school should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - An Interim Executive Board has recently replaced the previous governing body, which did not challenge leaders effectively or meet all of its statutory responsibilities. Members are ensuring that systems are put in place to generate the information they will need in order to hold leaders accountable. They understand the school's most urgent improvement priorities and are carrying these out appropriately.
 - Members visit the school regularly. However, they do not currently have sufficient data to check how well students are doing because effective procedures for monitoring achievement are not fully in place. The interim headteacher has started to provide members with information about the quality of teaching, but there is no system currently in place by which to manage teachers' performance, reward good teaching or tackle underperformance.
 - The Interim Executive Board has identified the weaknesses in how well the school meets safeguarding requirements, but has not yet ensured all have been fully addressed. At the start of the inspection, inspectors found that some staff recruitment checks had not been carried out.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Teachers' expectations of students' behaviour are not consistent, and too many do not respond effectively enough when students either show insufficient interest in learning or are disruptive.
- At times students receive too much support. They usually cannot move around the site without adult supervision, and sometimes they are given help when they could complete tasks successfully on their own. As a result, students' ability to develop their independence is limited. This means they are not sufficiently well prepared for the next stage in their education or employment.
- When students' attitudes are positive and they work hard, teachers are quick to recognise this and encourage it. Students now review their behaviour after each lesson and discuss with teachers how they can improve it. The school's monitoring information indicates that many are making the necessary modifications to their own behaviour.
- The interim headteacher is ensuring the proper recording of serious incidents of misconduct, including bullying and the use of unacceptable language, and the logging of the school's response. These records show that the incidence of such misbehaviour has recently reduced significantly.
- Students who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour are usually well supported by staff, who deal

with difficult situations appropriately. Teachers and other adults are beginning to pre-empt any difficulties and this sometimes prevents situations from escalating. Students, and some parents, have noted the calmer atmosphere around the school as a result. One parent commented that 'It used to feel like a youth club; now it feels like a school.'

- The school's monitoring information, although limited in its extent, indicates that students generally behave well when attending off-site alternative provision.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is inadequate. At the time of the inspection, some of the statutory pre-employment checks on the suitability of staff to work with children had not been carried out.
- Students are not able to move around the school independently, because doors have an automatic locking system which requires a card or a key to secure access. Students find this frustrating as they are not able to get to the toilet or, on occasion, to the lessons they are due to attend. At times, fire exits are kept locked, and fire extinguishers are not present in many classrooms.
- Risk assessments are in place to help ensure students are safe when accessing off-site alternative provision; discussions with students indicate that they feel safe during their off-site learning and visits during the inspection evidenced that they manage their behaviour well. However, detailed risk-assessments are not put in place before students take part in school trips and activities. Therefore it is not evident that the needs and the safety of students are fully taken in to account before, and met during, trips and visits.
- Students' attendance is too low. Until recently, information about absence has often been inaccurately recorded; students have been sent home for periods of time without having been formally excluded from school. Although there are instances where staff support or intervention has been successful in increasing attendance, such as in the case of looked-after children, there is insufficient evidence of overall improvement.
- Students understand the different forms that bullying can take, and say that it is infrequent. They believe that staff tackle it swiftly and effectively when it does occur.
- Students are aware of risks when using the internet. They understand how to use social networking sites carefully and why this is necessary.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Over time, many students have engaged in limited learning. This is because, until recently, students were not obliged to attend lessons and many chose not to do so. Until very recent timetabling changes, many students were unable to access core subjects such as English and mathematics. As a result, up until that point, some had experienced little or no teaching in one or more key subjects.
- Teachers do not have an accurate overview of what students already know, understand and can do. Initial assessments on entry have only recently been introduced. Without accurate information to work with, teachers are unable to match work appropriately to students' different needs and abilities and are unaware of the gaps in students' learning.
- Teaching does not enable students to make sufficient progress because planned activities for students that are rarely engaging or suitably challenging. Consequently, many students complete tasks that are too easy, or struggle with work that is too difficult. Some lose interest and disrupt the learning of others, sometimes significantly so.
- Often, teachers plan, primarily, to keep students busy, rather than to help them to learn anything worthwhile. This reflects the fact that their overriding priority has been to ensure that students attend

lessons, and stay in the classroom until their conclusion.

- Teachers do not manage students' behaviour consistently. When students walk out of lessons without permission, support staff, and sometimes teachers, spend significant amounts of time persuading students to return.
- Assessment is weak, and students' progress has not been monitored closely enough. Leaders' recent changes have helped ensure that information is collected, but arrangements to check the accuracy of the levels or marks applied to students' work, or the appropriateness of assessments, are not fully in place.
- Although students receive regular feedback about how far they have met their targets for behaviour, many teachers do not offer clear and precise subject-specific guidance about what it is they need to do in order to improve their work. Some continue to make the same mistakes as a result.
- Not all teachers help students to improve their literacy skills or provide sufficient encouragement for them to read more widely. As a result, the ability of some students to express their ideas or explain their answers is limited. Some struggle to understand what it is that particular kinds of question require them to do or to demonstrate.
- Support staff often help students to get back on task by encouraging them to have another try at a task they have adapted. They have built positive relationships with students, and remain calm with them even when they are disruptive or disrespectful. Sometimes, support staff offer students too much help when students are ready to try something for themselves. This limits their learning.
- Some teaching is enabling students to progress well. In mathematics, careful tracking of students' progress helps the teacher to plan activities that are engaging and stretching. Students generally work hard and are quickly moved on to more demanding work when they are ready. They are beginning to develop resilience because teaching helps them to learn from mistakes and builds their confidence. In science, those who have experienced little teaching in the subject in the past are starting to close the gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Imaginatively planned activities are promoting strong student engagement; during the inspection, students' involvement in a cross-curricular project helped them to develop their understanding of insects, their ability to write persuasively and their proficiency in the effective use of information communications technology.

The achievement of pupils is inadequate

- Students have made inadequate progress over time because teaching has been weak and, until recently, too many have not attended lessons on a consistent basis. Additionally, many have received little or no tuition in some subjects because of previous timetabling constraints.
- The school's monitoring records, though incomplete, indicate that the progress of those currently in Year 11 has been inadequate. Learning records and work in most students' books indicate that teaching has not enabled students to make adequate progress. In some subjects, students' books contain little work.
- Although the school has identified students who are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for disadvantaged students), this funding is held by the students' previous settings or named schools. As a result, the school does not have pupil premium funding to make use of. However, until very recently, leaders have not monitored the progress of these students well enough to know how well they are doing compared to others.
- Typically, the most-able students are not challenged to make the progress of which they are capable. This is because too often teachers' planning does not take in to account students' starting points, so the activities they complete are often too easy.
- Leaders do not have sufficiently accurate information about the progress of students who have disabilities

or special educational needs to identify any gaps in their knowledge or understanding, or differences between their progress and that of others. The impact of additional support upon these students' progress is unclear because it has not been tracked effectively.

- The school does not make use of early entry for GCSE, because leaders believe that to do so would limit students' attainment.
- Monitoring information, although limited, indicates that students' achievement when attending alternative provision off-site is at least in line with that within school.

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	139665
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	450137

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Chris Spencer
Headteacher (Interim)	Sue Kirrage
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01842 752756
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