

Ralph Thoresby School

Holtdale Approach, Leeds, West Yorkshire, LS16 7RX

Inspection dates 10–11 March 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- As a result of good and sometimes outstanding teaching, students make good progress across a wide range of subjects, including mathematics and English.
- From starting points that are well below average on entry to the school the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at A*-C, including English and mathematics, is close to average.
- The quality of teaching is good, as clear explanations and regular checking of students' work help them make good progress.
- Those students with physical disabilities and visual impairment make strong progress and achieve well because of the good support they receive.
- Sixth form students make outstanding progress in vocational courses because of high quality teaching.
- The curriculum promotes strong personal development for students, with highly effective experiences that promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- Students behave well. They say they feel safe and are well cared for. Students have positive attitudes to learning and make a good contribution the progress they are making.
- Middle leaders, including subject leaders, know what is expected of them and regularly check on the quality of teaching and learning. This has supported improvements in teaching and achievement since the previous inspection.
- Senior leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's performance. They have used performance management for teachers rigorously to improve teaching and achievement to good.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students are not closing rapidly enough at Key Stage 4.
- The quality of teaching and achievement across a number of science courses is not consistently good.
- The numbers of students regularly absent from school has not reduced swiftly enough to ensure that attendance is higher than average.
- The provision for those sixth form students who do not have at least grade C in GCSE English and/or mathematics does not lead to high levels of success.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of teaching and learning in parts of lessons. Four observations were undertaken jointly with the leaders of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with three groups of students about their learning in lessons and their safety in the school.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors. A meeting was held with two representative of the local authority. Meetings were held with school staff, including middle and senior leaders.
- Inspectors also looked at the school’s review of its own performance, its development plan, school policies and the minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors also considered a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors looked at students’ work in lessons and also analysed samples of students’ work in exercise books.
- Inspectors analysed the 72 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View.
- There were 64 questionnaires completed by staff which were also considered by inspectors.

Inspection team

James McGrath, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Janet Pruchniewicz	Additional Inspector
Jane Holmes	Additional Inspector
Andrew Henderson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority).
- The majority of students are White British. Students from Pakistani backgrounds are the largest other minority ethnic group. Most students speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- There are seven alternative providers currently used by the school: The Hunslet Club; Tinshill Pupil Referral Unit; Burley Park Pupil Referral Unit; Involve; Grafton Teaching Hospital; Leeds City College and Music and Art Production.
- The sixth form is part of a partnership with Lawnswood School.
- The school has a specialist resourced provision supporting physically disabled and visually-impaired students.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The school is part of the North West Leeds Education Partnership Trust. This is a partnership with three local primary schools and the secondary school.
- Since the previous inspection there have been additional appointments to the senior leadership team and changes to subject leadership.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, especially in science, in order to raise students' achievement further by ensuring that:
 - questioning is highly skilful and challenges students to think deeply about what they are learning
 - marking consistently provides the best advice for students to know what they need to do to improve
 - the work set for disadvantaged students is challenging and matches their needs
 - high expectations are consistently set for the presentation of students' work.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - the quality of teaching and achievement is consistently good across all science courses
 - the provision for those entering the sixth form without grade C in GCSE English and/or mathematics leads to high levels of success
 - all groups of students attend regularly so that overall attendance improves to above average
 - gaps in achievement between disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students in Key Stage 4 close rapidly.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are highly ambitious for the students. They have taken appropriate action to ensure that the overall effectiveness of the school has improved to good since the previous inspection. Morale in the school is high and there is a culture of high expectations which is supported by all staff.
- Leadership has an accurate view of the school's strengths and its areas for improvement. They have successfully improved the quality of teaching and middle leadership through judicious use of sharing best practice in school and targeted use of external support.
- Middle leaders are clear about what is expected of them and check on the progress of students and the quality of teaching using a wide range of information. They have played a key part in ensuring that the quality of teaching and achievement have improved. The school has increased the capacity of its senior leadership team to ensure that where there are any shortcomings in subject leadership, effective coaching is available and improvements are being seen.
- Performance management for teachers is rigorous and identifies the skills they need to improve. It also supports the identification of strong practice that can be shared among the community of teachers in the school and more widely across the Trust. Training is provided for teaching assistants and other adults to make sure they provide good quality support to students. This is a good example of the school's commitment to equality of opportunity.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively throughout the school to provide additional teaching support for disadvantaged students and to improve attendance for these students. It is most effective in Key Stage 3 where gaps in attainment are closing quickly. Attainment gaps are not closing rapidly enough in Key Stage 4, as, too often, these students are absent from school and this inhibits their achievement.
- The curriculum prepares students well for their future education and training as there is a good range of subjects and also an emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills. There are many additional sporting and other activities. Students speak freely about the enjoyment that large numbers of them gained from being involved in the school production.
- Good careers information, advice and guidance help students to select appropriate courses to fulfil their ambitions. All students leaving the school in 2014 went on to education, training or employment.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. The school's 'student parliament' is part of the school's work in promoting democracy. Students say they enjoy the five 'enrichment days' where they work with people from different faiths and cultures and the elderly in the community. These activities develop an acute sense of life in modern Britain and support the work of the school in fostering good relationships and tackling discrimination.
- Partnership working is strong. The headteacher runs half-termly 'drop-in' sessions with parents to gauge their opinions. There are close links with other agencies and with the parents of vulnerable students. The headteacher has developed links with other schools to share expertise in teaching and learning in order to improve the school. The school links closely with its Trust Partners to run a number of joint projects such as a joint 'summer school' and work to meet the requirements of the new National Curriculum in primary and secondary mathematics and English.
- The local authority has provided good support in checking on the performance of the school with the headteacher and supporting the development of leadership across the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have a good range of skills and experience which allow them to hold the school to account for its performance. They are fully aware of the achievement of students in comparison to national measures, understand the data well, and are fully involved in setting the strategic direction of the school. They link well with subject leaders and other middle leaders to determine the quality of teaching, achievement and behaviour across the school. They check on the use of the pupil premium and know the impact of its allocation. A governor with specific responsibility for disadvantaged students is working with senior leaders to ensure further improvements for these students. Governors provide good support and challenge to improve the overall effectiveness of the school.
 - They use their skills well and carry out checks on the school's budget. Governors are aware of the quality of teaching and understand fully the arrangements linking teachers' performance and pay. They have supported the headteacher in taking action to secure improved teaching and improvements in leadership. Governors ensure that the school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and check that relevant systems and training are secure.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students are keen to learn and follow the instructions of their teachers. They are hard working and make good progress in their lessons. There are occasions when they do not take enough care with the presentation of their work.
- Uniform is worn with pride and students are dressed smartly. Students are pleasant, polite and courteous to visitors. Around school they are well behaved and get on well together. They are proud of their school, which is free of litter.
- The school is a calm and purposeful place. It is a harmonious community and those students with physical disabilities and visual impairment are integrated exceptionally well into the life of the school.
- Students are punctual to school and to their lessons.
- Sixth form students make a good contribution to the work of the school. They mentor younger students and support them with their academic studies. Sixth formers organise charitable events and encourage other students to become involved.
- Students say behaviour has improved and they clearly understand what is required of them.
- The 'Bridge', the school's behaviour support area, has helped some students to manage behaviour much better. Students are well supported and this has led to a reduction in exclusions, which are now below average.
- Since the previous inspection, there are more students attending school regularly and attendance has improved. It is now broadly average. However, the number of students regularly absent remains above average. In particular, although their attendance has improved, disadvantaged students are absent too often, especially in Year 11, and this is impacting negatively on the progress they are making.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students are clear about what constitutes bullying. Records show that incidents are very rare and students confirm this. Students have confidence that the school deals with incidents highly effectively.
- Students have a good understanding of internet safety. The school promotes this well through assemblies, form time and 'enrichment days' that are linked to students knowing how to stay safe.
- Arrangements to support students studying off site are good. There are clear arrangements with providers to check on the safety and attendance of students. Also, arrangements to support vulnerable students are good, with effective links to outside agencies.
- Parents and staff share the same, positive views about students' behaviour and safety.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is usually good, with some examples of outstanding practice. As a result, most students make good progress and achieve well in reading, literacy and mathematics.
- Students are given clear and concise explanations about what is required of them and what is to be learned. They know what they have to do to achieve well. Consequently, students make good progress.
- The checking of students' work during lessons is done swiftly and points for improvement are raised quickly. This helps students' learning to flow well and, as a result, they learn at a good pace. Questioning of individual students to improve their work is good.
- Questioning is also used well to involve students and to search out what they understand. Good examples of challenging questioning were seen in a Year 9 history lesson where students were considering 'Was Dunkirk a success or a disaster?' Students debated this exceptionally well and made outstanding progress. However, there are occasions when questioning can be superficial and not challenging enough for all students to think deeply about their learning and, as a result, students do not benefit as much as they should.
- Work is marked regularly with helpful comments that students respond to well. There are many good examples of marking, particularly in English, and in many other subjects. Occasionally, the advice provided to help students is not precise enough for them to know what to do to improve and does not match the best practice in the school.
- A strong focus on literacy and the development of technical vocabulary are features in most lessons. There are good opportunities for students to use their mathematical skills appropriately across many

subjects.

- An analysis of work in students' books showed that teachers do ensure that work set matches the needs and abilities of most students and good progress is being made. However, it also showed that work set for disadvantaged students isn't always sufficiently challenging. When this occurs, the progress of disadvantaged students slows and they do not have opportunities to work at the highest standards expected of them.
- Skilled teaching assistants make a good contribution to the learning of students. They are well managed and support students effectively, particularly those who are disabled and those with special educational needs. They work skilfully with individuals or groups of students, both inside and outside the classroom.
- Good relationships between adults and students are a key feature in all lessons. Mutual respect assists in ensuring good classroom behaviour and that students do as they are asked with lessons flowing smoothly.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' progress has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Leadership's determined efforts have improved teaching so that it is consistently good and, as a consequence, achievement is good across the school.
- In 2014, from starting points that were generally well below average, the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades at A*-C, including English and mathematics, improved to be close to average. The overall progress students made in their 'best 8' subjects at GCSE was above average.
- Since the previous inspection, students' progress in both English and mathematics has improved and is now good. There are more students making better progress than they should in these subjects and this compares favourably with national expectations.
- Students achieve well in art, information and communication technology (ICT), business studies, child development, media studies and sports studies. However, they are not making consistently strong progress in all of their science courses. Recently, leaders have started to support teaching and leadership in science and there are signs that this is beginning to secure better achievement.
- Information provided by the school and supported by inspection evidence shows that there should be further improvements in the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE grades at A*-C, including English and mathematics, in 2015. The school indicates that, because subject leadership and the quality of teaching are improving, students are set to make better progress than in previous years.
- The most able students make the same progress as similar students in other schools. In the past, not enough of these students have reached the highest GCSE grades, although this is set to rise due to improvements in teaching and greater challenge for these students.
- At the end of Year 11 in 2014, disadvantaged students were one GCSE grade behind non-disadvantaged students in the school in English and one grade behind non-disadvantaged students nationally. In mathematics, they were one and a half GCSE grades behind non-disadvantaged students in the school and one and a half grades behind non-disadvantaged students nationally. Overall, disadvantaged students made less progress than non-disadvantaged students. Information provided by the school and a work scrutiny by inspectors show that attainment and progress gaps are closing faster in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are making similar progress to that of others in the school. This has improved because of better leadership, well-planned additional support and work being set that better matches the needs of these students.
- In particular, those students who have physical disabilities and visual impairment receive highly effective support so they can achieve well when working with other students across the school.
- There are very few students who study at alternative provision. Comparisons between those students and others in the school and nationally are, therefore, not statistically valid.
- The school does not use early entry to GCSE.
- Year 7 catch-up funding (government funding for those entering secondary school with below average standards in English and mathematics) is helping to improve students' literacy and mathematical skills well.
- The school is promoting reading well and regularly checks on improvements in students' reading skills. Through their English lessons, additional time is given to students to read for pleasure and to be supported to read better. Reading does not inhibit students' learning as they are capable accessing all of the information provided to them across all of their subjects.

The sixth form provision**is good**

- Since the previous inspection, sixth form provision has improved and is now good.
- Slower progress in academic courses in Year 12 than in Year 13 has now been resolved. Professional development for teachers has improved the quality of teaching over time and it is now good. This leads to achievement in the sixth form being good.
- Overall, attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average. In 2014, students' progress in academic courses in Years 12 and 13 was good, with students reaching standards that compare well with national averages. As a result, all students at the end of Year 13 were able to meet the requirements for the university of their choice or their career ambitions in employment or training successfully. Those in Year 12 continued on into Year 13 in much higher numbers than previously.
- Vocational courses are highly successful and a strength of the sixth form. Students make exceptional progress due to high quality teaching and strong student commitment to do well.
- Students who enter the sixth form without a grade C in GCSE English and/or mathematics are not successful enough in achieving grade C in these subjects by the time they leave. Provision for these students does not enable them to be highly successful in their re-sits.
- There are too few disabled students and those with special educational needs to make valid statistical comparisons with others in the sixth form. Disadvantaged students make the same good progress as non-disadvantaged students.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Decisive steps have been taken to strengthen provision, with a positive impact on achievement and retention. Ambition and expectations are high for students and staff. Leaders are well aware that there is still some unevenness in achievement in academic subjects and are taking appropriate action to ensure that progress is strong in all subjects.
- The school works in a successful partnership with another local school to provide a wide range of academic courses supplemented by a good variety of vocational courses. Leaders check on the learning of students across the partnership to ensure that provision is at least good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their studies and a growing confidence in their ability to succeed. There are good systems to check on students' achievement and they are well supported should they fall behind. They value their good relationships with staff and the strong guidance that helps direct their next steps in education or employment.
- Sixth form students willingly take on responsibilities for supporting younger students and charity fundraising. They are confident that their views matter. They participate fully in a wide range of additional opportunities to enrich their studies. As a result, they gain in stature as they progress through the sixth form and are confident, responsible young adults.

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	108075
Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	453621

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
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	886
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Simon Deacon
Headteacher	Will Carr
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2013
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