

The Ferrers School

Queensway, Higham Ferrers, Rushden, Northamptonshire NN10 8LF

Inspection dates

15–16 May 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders, including governors, have not ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective. They have not ensured that pupils' safeguarding files are accurate or updated in a timely fashion.
- Subject leaders have been too slow to reduce inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning in their departments.
- Leaders have not taken swift and effective action to improve pupils' progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Leaders have not ensured that additional funding is used effectively to help eligible pupils make the progress that they should.
- Teachers do not use assessment information effectively. This results in poor planning and work that does not match the needs and abilities of pupils, including the most and the least able.
- Teachers do not use questioning well enough to check pupils' understanding and to deepen their learning.
- Pupils do not know what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers do not consistently apply the school's assessment and feedback policy.
- In too many lessons, low-level disruption affects how well pupils learn.
- Absence, persistent absence and exclusions for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are too high.
- Sixth-form students do not attend as well as they should. However, generally, provision in the sixth form is effective.
- Pupils lack confidence in their ability to do well.
- A significant minority of pupils report that they do not trust that bullying would be dealt with effectively by adults in the school.
- Until recently, governors have not held leaders to account. They have been too reliant on the information provided to them by school leaders and not challenged leaders on their actions.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has high expectations. She has taken decisive actions to improve the school.
- Leaders are now taking action to improve the quality of teaching.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved since the start of the year.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently address the serious weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements by:
 - ensuring that all leaders responsible for safeguarding, including governors, know, understand and carry out their duties in line with statutory guidance
 - keeping accurate and rigorous safeguarding files, which are updated in a timely manner.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all subject leaders monitor and improve the quality of teaching and learning within their subjects, particularly in English and mathematics
 - ensuring that leaders use additional funding effectively, including that for disadvantaged pupils, for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and the Year 7 catch-up funding, to raise the achievement of eligible pupils
 - strengthening the role of governors, so that school leaders are effectively held to account and supported.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and its impact on pupils' progress by:
 - using information about pupils' abilities and needs to plan learning that sufficiently challenges the most able pupils and provides focused support for the least able, so that they all make good progress
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities receive better support, so that they can catch up with other pupils
 - applying consistently the school's assessment and feedback policy, so pupils know what they need to do to improve
 - using effective questioning that challenges pupils' misconceptions and moves them on to the next stage of their learning.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - ensuring that leaders and staff deal promptly and effectively with all incidents of bullying, so that their occurrence is minimised and pupils are encouraged to have respect for each other
 - supporting all pupils to become self-confident, resilient learners

- eradicating low-level disruption in class, so that all pupils can make at least good progress
- further reducing absence, persistent absence and exclusions, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.
- Improve provision in the sixth form by monitoring students' attendance more rigorously and ensuring that all students attend well.

An external review of the school's governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Leaders, including governors, have not fulfilled their responsibilities to ensure that pupils in their care are safeguarded. Some pupils report that they do not feel safe in school, that when bullying takes place it is not resolved and that they do not have anyone to talk to whom they trust. Leaders, including governors, have failed to create an environment where all pupils can flourish.
- Leaders were not expecting pupils' GCSE examination results in summer 2017 to be below the government's current floor standards. Inaccurate assessment and an over-reliance on attainment scores rather than measures of pupils' progress meant that leaders did not have a precise view of how well pupils were doing. Leaders have only recently begun to gain a secure picture of how well pupils are performing.
- Leaders have been too slow to stem the decline in pupils' progress across a range of different subjects, including English and mathematics. Different groups of pupils, including boys, disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, and the least able pupils do not make as much progress as their peers. Improvements in the progress of pupils in these groups are tentative and not yet sustained.
- Leaders have not used additional funding well enough to secure better outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The school's use of the pupil premium funding was externally reviewed in January 2018, prompted by the headteacher's concerns about pupils' progress. As a result, leaders have put in place new strategies to help disadvantaged pupils make more rapid progress. At key stage 4, the funding is beginning to have an effect. However, leaders are not using the funding to raise the achievement of pupils in key stage 3.
- Leaders do not make effective use of the Year 7 catch-up funding to support pupils so that they make faster progress in reading and mathematics. While pupils have made slight improvements with the accuracy of their spellings, their reading ages have declined. Leaders have not made any specific provision for pupils who need to improve their numeracy.
- Leadership of the provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is not effective. Leaders do not have a clear understanding of how well these pupils are doing, as they do not track their progress carefully enough. The support from teaching assistants focuses more on pupils' social and behavioural needs, rather than their academic progress.
- Leaders have not ensured that the school's curriculum focuses on British values sufficiently or prepares pupils for life in modern Britain. Pupils lack an understanding and appreciation of, for example, democracy and issues of equality. As a result, they have a limited understanding of how British values relate to their lives.
- Newly qualified teachers are given effective support to help them to develop their teaching practice.
- The deputy headteacher, recently appointed to lead teaching and learning, has begun to improve the quality of teaching in some areas. He has a realistic understanding of

what actions need to be taken and has provided training for teachers, for example on effective questioning.

- Leaders have recently introduced new strategies, such as the '20-day challenge', to increase pupils' confidence and build their resilience. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these strategies on pupils' progress.
- Until recently, subject leaders have not been held to account for the responsibilities they hold. Subject leaders are enthusiastic and are beginning to take greater responsibility for the quality of teaching in their areas. The relatively new leaders of English and mathematics are also receiving additional external support to increase their effectiveness. Subject leaders are bringing about improvements in the quality of teaching in some areas, but these developments are not widespread and have not yet had sufficient impact on pupils' progress.
- The new headteacher conveys a strong passion and determination to build a culture of aspiration for pupils in the school. She has been successful in communicating clear messages about school improvement priorities across the school.
- A new behaviour policy has improved standards of behaviour in lessons and the quality of teaching is beginning to improve, although inadequacies remain in both areas. The headteacher has restructured the senior leadership team to increase capacity, and leaders at all levels fully support her vision and aims. Staff morale is high.
- It is recommended that newly qualified teachers can be appointed to the school.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has overseen a decline in standards in the school. Until recently, governors have not been carrying out their roles effectively. They have not ensured that leaders have provided them with the accurate information they need. This means they have not been able to hold leaders to account, for safeguarding and pupils' outcomes. Governors' oversight of the pupil premium, Year 7 catch-up funding and funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has not been rigorous enough.
- The GCSE results in summer 2017 came as something of a shock and acted as a 'wake-up call' for governors. Governors are now aware of the school's weaknesses. They monitor pupils' outcomes and ask challenging questions of leaders.
- Governors are committed to the school. They have a wide range of expertise and knowledge. Some new governors recognise, however, that they do not have the necessary skills to be able to interrogate confidently information on pupils' outcomes. They have sought additional support from an external organisation to address their weaknesses.
- Governors are making links with different subjects so that they can support teaching and learning much more closely. This arrangement is still in its infancy and it is too soon to judge its effectiveness.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

- Leaders in charge of safeguarding have not ensured that pupils' safeguarding files are accurate, detailed or updated in a timely fashion. Information about individual pupils is not held in one place.
- Leaders and governors have not taken appropriate action to secure the school's site. During lessons, visitors can access the site through an open gate and enter school buildings. Cameras on the gate are not carefully monitored. Pupils and staff raised concerns about the gate with inspectors and through the Ofsted surveys. Leaders completed a risk assessment for the open gate while the on-site inspection was taking place.
- One quarter of the pupils who responded to the Ofsted survey said they do not feel safe in school. One third of the pupils who responded said they have no adult to talk to about their concerns, including in relation to bullying. Some pupils said they do not know who is responsible for safeguarding in school. A notable proportion of parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted survey have concerns about the safety and welfare of their children in school and how effectively leaders respond to these issues.
- Until recently, leaders did not record when sixth-form students leave or arrive on the school's site from one of the other sixth-form consortium schools. They did not know whether the students had arrived safely at the other schools. Leaders devised a system for students to sign on and off site during the inspection.
- During the inspection, leaders tightened procedures and updated records of recruitment checks for those working and volunteering at the school. They have now carried out all the relevant checks.
- Most staff and governors have received recent safeguarding training, including in relation to radicalisation and extremism. However, leaders' training records reveal that some staff have not completed all their training.
- Governors' oversight of safeguarding is inadequate. Governors have not identified weaknesses in the school's safeguarding practices or procedures. They have not ensured that pupils in the school are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching is poor across a range of subjects and year groups. Areas for improvement identified when the school was last inspected have not been resolved. Too few pupils make the progress they should.
- Teachers do not make effective use of assessment information to set work that is at the right level. They do not support the least able pupils well. Too often, teachers set work for the most able pupils that is too easy and does not challenge them to extend their learning. Pupils who responded to the Ofsted survey said that teachers do not give them work that challenges them. As a result, pupils, particularly the most able, do not make the progress they should.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils are capable of are not high enough. Pupils do not take enough pride in their work.
- The quality of teaching in English is not consistently strong enough to secure the rapid improvements in pupils' outcomes that are required.

- Teachers do not routinely follow the school's marking policy. Pupils do not receive clear guidance on how to improve their work.
- Teachers do not use questioning to support pupils to make faster progress. They often waste opportunities to check and deepen pupils' understanding. Some teachers move on without clarifying the learning that has taken place. They do not ensure that all pupils participate in discussions, meaning too many pupils are passive and not fully engaged.
- Instability of staffing has meant that some pupils have had several changes of teacher, as well as non-specialist staff teaching some subjects. These inconsistencies have led to some pupils making slower progress because of weaker teaching.
- Teachers do not support pupils' literacy skills well enough across the curriculum.
- Teaching assistants do not have a close enough focus on the progress pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make with their learning.
- When pupils use derogatory language towards others, adults do not always challenge them.
- There are some examples of effective teaching in the school. In these cases, teachers and pupils have positive relationships that encourage pupils to seek help.
- Some teachers have strong subject knowledge which they use to plan activities that build on pupils' starting points. They ask probing questions to extend pupils' learning and build their oral confidence.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Pupils say that bullying takes place in school and adults do not always resolve incidents effectively. Younger pupils with whom inspectors spoke said pupils are bullied if they are different to others. These pupils also expressed concerns about some places in school where they do not feel safe.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive. A minority of pupils do not show teachers respect, talking over them or speaking out of turn. They are sometimes slow to respond to teachers' requests.
- Pupils lack confidence and aspiration. Too often they are passive in class, rather than engaging with the learning. They cannot articulate what they have learned to others effectively.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online. They have also received guidance on issues relevant to their local context, for example on gangs and knife crime.
- Pupils engage in a range of enrichment activities, such as The Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, which is in its third year. The new headteacher has introduced further

extra-curricular and leadership opportunities. For example, inspectors observed the work of the 'student union' during an assembly. These activities are too new to evaluate their impact on those involved.

- Pupils' presentation and the quality of their work is inconsistent but improving. However, boys do not take enough pride in their work. The plans to support children who are looked after by the local authority are detailed. These pupils currently on roll attend well and are making steady progress.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Pupils do not attend school as well as they should. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders' actions are beginning to improve attendance. These improvements, however, are not yet rapid or sustained.
- Too many pupils arrive late at school each morning. Actions by leaders to improve punctuality are not effective.
- The proportion of pupils who received a fixed-term exclusion was above the national average for the last two years. The rate of fixed-term exclusions has reduced this year, but it remains too high. Disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, and boys are more likely to be excluded than other pupils. These are the same pupils who consistently underachieve in school.
- Too many lessons are disrupted by pupils engaging in low-level disruption. Pupils told inspectors that behaviour in lessons is only slowly improving. When the behaviour of pupils in lessons is poor, the learning of all pupils slows.
- Some staff say that pupils' behaviour is poor, and adults do not manage it well. However, there are some signs of improving behaviour since the start of this academic year. Pupils in different alternative off-site provisions attend and behave well. There are good links between the school and the providers to check on pupils' safety and learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Weak teaching has resulted in pupils making inadequate progress during their time at the school. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, boys and the least able pupils. In 2017, the overall progress of pupils in Year 11 was in the lowest 10% of all schools nationally.
- Disadvantaged pupils underachieve across a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics, science and humanities. Their overall progress was in the lowest 10% of all schools nationally in 2016 and 2017. Current disadvantaged pupils are not making strong enough progress to catch up with other pupils. For some of these pupils, their progress is affected by poor attendance or too many exclusions.
- Pupils' progress in English is too low. In 2017, progress in English declined from the previous year and was significantly below the national average for all prior-attainment

groups and for disadvantaged pupils. Current Year 11 pupils continue to underachieve in English.

- Pupils of all prior-attainment groups, and specifically the least able pupils, are underachieving in English and mathematics.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities also make poor progress. Their progress in English, mathematics, science and humanities declined notably in 2017. Leaders do not track the progress of these pupils rigorously enough to ensure that any support focuses on closing the gaps with other pupils.
- Boys make slower progress than girls in all subject areas, other than mathematics. The difference between overall girls' and boys' progress increased in 2017. This progress gap has not closed noticeably for current boys and girls in Years 10 or 11.
- Pupils' progress in modern foreign languages was in the bottom 10% nationally in 2017. Leaders are not confident about the accuracy of predicted outcomes in modern foreign languages for current pupils. This is due to staffing instabilities throughout the GCSE course.
- In 2016 and 2017, pupils' progress in mathematics was significantly below the national average, particularly for the least able pupils and pupils of average ability. Some improvements are evident. Current Year 11 pupils are making better progress in mathematics, due to closer support and improved teaching.
- In Years 7 and 8, an increased proportion of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are on track to meet their target grades in English and mathematics, when compared to older pupils.
- Pupils are well informed about their options for future education, employment and training. The proportion of pupils who secure sustained post-16 destinations is higher than the national average. In 2017, however, some pupils' options were affected because they had to resit their English and mathematics qualifications.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is variable but improving. Consortium leaders check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the 16 to 19 programmes. This has enabled them to identify areas of strength and weakness in different subjects and to take action to bring about improvements.
- Students' progress is not consistently strong across the full range of subjects. Current Year 12 and 13 students are underperforming in business studies and physics. Year 13 students are also underperforming in geography and chemistry.
- Parents raised concerns in the Ofsted survey that too many changes to their children's teachers have had a detrimental impact on their children's learning.
- Sixth-form students do not attend school as well as younger pupils. On average, each sixth-form student is absent from school for one day every fortnight. While there has been some improvement in the attendance of sixth-form students, leaders recognise that there is scope to reduce their absences further.
- The school meets the requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes. Leaders ensure that all students undertake work experience. This provides them with an insight into

the world of work. Some students, however, do not feel that the experience helps to inform their future career choices.

- There are relatively few opportunities for students to extend their learning beyond the classroom through extra-curricular activities, for example as a 'community leader'.
- In 2017, students' progress was in the top 10% nationally for academic qualifications. Male students and those students who gained B and C grades at GCSE achieved particularly well.
- Students who are required to resit GCSE English or mathematics on entering the sixth form receive support to enable them to attain these qualifications. In 2017, the proportion of students who gained a pass grade in each qualification was close to or above the national averages.
- Where teaching is strong, mutual respect creates positive relationships between the teachers and the students. In these lessons, teachers plan appropriately challenging activities for students, leading to students engaging actively in their learning and making more rapid progress.
- The leader of the sixth form has a clear vision for the provision and understands its strengths and weaknesses. She works closely with her counterparts at other schools within the consortium. Consequently, students can study an increasing range of subjects, with flexible entry requirements, including more courses that bridge the gap from GCSE to A-level study. Pupils also can study for the extended project qualification. Sixth-form retention rates are high.
- Leaders help students to make informed choices about their future careers and education. Students are well supported and guided through the process of choosing and applying to universities, and of securing apprenticeships and jobs. An increasing proportion of students are securing places at university.
- Students are confident communicators. They know how to keep themselves safe, including online, when in relationships and out in the local community. They also value the support they receive regarding their mental health and emotional well-being.
- Students wear lanyards with badges to identify them in and around school. They expressed concerns, however, about the security of the school site. Students now understand the importance of signing on and off site when they leave to go to another school. Safeguarding is effective in the sixth form.

School details

Unique reference number	139988
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10054083

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

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1051
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Hopkins
Headteacher	Angela Smith
Telephone number	01933313411
Website	www.theferrers.northants.sch.uk
Email address	mail@theferrers.org
Date of previous inspection	4–5 February 2015

Information about this school

- The school is larger than an average-sized secondary school.
- The school converted to be a stand-alone academy in August 2013. The governing body is responsible for the school's governance.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2017. Since then, responsibilities in the senior leadership team have been reorganised. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in January 2018. A significant number of teaching staff left the school in August 2017.

- The school's post-16 provision is provided as part of a consortium arrangement with two other local schools: Huxlow Science College and Rushden Academy. Each provider delivers some of the post-16 courses on their own school site. The consortium is known as The East Northamptonshire College.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs, or with an education, health and care plan is also below average.
- The school uses Progress School, Rushmere Academy and The CE Academy as alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 45 lessons, across a wide range of subjects and in all key stages, including the sixth form. Some lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed tutor time and one assembly.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons across all year groups and a sample of pupils' books.
- The lead inspector held a range of meetings, including with: the headteacher; the deputy headteacher responsible for pupils' outcomes and for the pupil premium funding; the assistant headteacher who has oversight of safeguarding; members of the governing body; and subject leaders. The lead inspector also spoke with the chair of the governing body on the telephone.
- Inspectors held a range of meetings, including with leaders responsible for: the sixth form; behaviour and attendance; teaching and learning; the curriculum and careers; provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities; personal, social, health and economic education; and pastoral issues. Inspectors also met with a group of staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, before school and during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke formally with pupils from key stage 3 and key stage 4, and a group of pupils from the sixth form. Inspectors also spoke with other pupils informally.
- An inspector listened to pupils from Year 7 reading.
- An inspector spoke with representatives from alternative providers that pupils from the school attend.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents relating to the school's provision, including: self-evaluation and improvement planning; minutes of the governing body meetings; plans related to additional government funding; behaviour, attendance and exclusion records; achievement information; and safeguarding. The lead inspector also checked the school's single central register and the school's system for recruiting staff.
- Inspectors evaluated the 88 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, including the 45 free-text responses.
- Inspectors analysed the 51 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.
- Inspectors considered the 110 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.

Inspection team

Rachel Tordoff, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Jackie Thornalley	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Wilson	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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