

The Reach Free School

Unit 3, Wolsey Business Park, Watford, WD18 9BL

Inspection dates 2–3 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- School leaders, including governors, have quickly established a very positive, caring ethos in which students feel valued, have the confidence to achieve and make good academic progress.
- Governors, under the strong leadership of the Chair of the governors, are very well informed about the work of the school. Together with leaders, they have had a significant impact in improving the quality of education, and particularly teaching, in the school.
- Students have a love of reading. Due to the strong emphasis placed on this by the school, students' reading ages have improved rapidly.
- Most teachers make good use of information about the progress their students are making. This is contributing to strong and improving teaching and ensuring achievement is good for almost all groups of students.
- Leaders, at all levels, ensure that the school is a safe and secure place to be. Students say that they feel extremely safe and parents agree.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are very well cared for and make good progress.
- Most students' behaviour is characterised by courtesy and tolerance towards each other and adults within the school. This helps to create a positive climate for learning in which students are able to achieve well.
- Community work is a strength of the school. Students quickly develop the skills needed to host events and are acutely aware of the importance of being a central part of the local community. This is preparing them well for life beyond school.
- Effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students ensures that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers consistently plan learning activities that fully reflect students' abilities.
- In a small minority of cases, students do not take enough care over the way they present their written work.
- Students are not given helpful enough advice by some teachers about how to improve their work.
- Boys do not write as well as girls because they are not encouraged sufficiently by teachers to use a formal style.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 20 lessons, across a range of subjects, in both Years 7 and 8. These visits included five joint observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors also observed tutor sessions and the school’s reading programme, ‘Reach for a book’.
- Inspectors observed students in lessons, when arriving at school and during break and lunch times.
- The inspection team spoke to students, teachers and governors, and held telephone discussions with a representative of the local authority and with the school’s adviser from the Department for Education.
- Inspectors considered 29 parent responses to Parent View, the online survey for parents provided by Ofsted. They also took account of additional surveys of parental opinion conducted by the school.
- The inspection team undertook a scrutiny of documents including: the school’s self-evaluation document; its development plan; information relating to the quality of teaching; data on the achievement and attainment of students; a range of school policies; and the arrangements in place for the safeguarding of students.
- Inspectors analysed 13 questionnaires completed by the 20 members of staff currently employed by the school.

Inspection team

John Lucas, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Kim Hall

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Reach Free School opened in September 2013.
- The school currently has students in Year 7 and Year 8. As a result, it is significantly smaller than most secondary schools. The number of students entering the school at other than the usual times is high and many students have joined the school after the start of Year 7.
- Currently there is no sixth form in the school but there are plans for it in the future.
- The majority of students are White British.
- The proportion of students who have English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is below the national average. This is additional funding for children in local authority care and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- There are no looked after children currently on roll at the school.
- The school does not make use of any additional off-site provision for its students.
- The school will enter students for external examinations for the first time in 2018. Consequently, it is not possible to compare the school's performance with the government's floor standard.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the achievement of all students, and particularly that of boys in writing, by ensuring:
 - the writing of all students is always accurate and neatly presented and that students learn how to write using both formal and informal styles
 - all teachers consistently plan lesson activities that fully reflect the abilities of all groups of students
 - the feedback teachers give to students is precise and clear enough for them to understand how to make improvements to their work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher leads with calm authority and is ably supported by his senior team. Together they have ensured that the collective vision of 'achievement, community and enjoyment' is central to the work of the school. This has established a school community in which almost all students feel valued, behave well and are able to make good and, in some cases, outstanding progress.
- School leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching in the school. Their high expectations and careful monitoring, combined with a willingness to tackle any ineffective practice, have led to good teaching. Steps are in place to improve teaching even further.
- Middle leaders are effective in their work. They are aware of the capabilities and learning needs of their students. Leaders use this information to amend the curriculum to help students make good progress. For example, in English, the school offers additional literacy lessons for students who need them, enabling them to make faster progress and close any gaps in their understanding quickly. In mathematics, students who join the school part way through the academic year are provided with additional resources and lessons; this helps them to develop the high levels of skill needed to make good progress.
- Adults in the school value the good training opportunities leaders make available to them. These are carefully targeted at the needs of both teachers and teaching assistants. For example, teachers have received training in the use of questioning to challenge the most-able students more effectively, which is enabling them to push these students to attain higher standards. Newly qualified teachers and trainee teachers are overwhelmingly positive about the quality of mentoring they receive, and this is helping them to make rapid improvements to their teaching.
- School leaders have successfully developed a broad and balanced curriculum which promotes equality of opportunity and good progress for almost all groups of students. Leaders regularly review and adapt the curriculum so that it meets the learning needs of students. The school helps students to develop a good understanding of British values and prepares them well for life in modern Britain, through work on topics such as democracy and tolerance. The provision of 'Electives' (additional learning opportunities provided at the end of each school day), such as dance, debating and forensics, enables students to experience a wide range of additional topics and activities. One student commented: 'Electives are amazing.'
- The school's well-designed and well-led programme for supporting reading ensures it is exceptionally well promoted across the school. Students are overwhelmingly positive about the daily 'Reach for a book' sessions which have helped them to develop a love of reading. Students read independently, in pairs or with adults, and tackle complex texts with confidence. School leaders encourage students to read a range of books including Shakespeare and modern literature such as '1984'.
- Subject leaders weave themes designed to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development skilfully into many lessons. Students value the opportunity to listen to speakers from a range of religious and cultural backgrounds. They speak with pride about their knowledge of other cultures, some of which has been gained from their experiences when visiting other countries as part of the school visits programme. There is no evidence of discrimination of any sort in the school. The information, advice, including careers advice, and other guidance the school provides for students in Year 8 are preparing them well for the next stage of their education.
- Students understand the importance of working with the local community. The school makes highly effective use of weekly sessions in the 'Community Common Room'. These are lessons which develop students' community awareness and enable them to organise events such as lunches and dances for older community members to attend. In the words of one student, 'It helps us to give something back to the community'.
- School leaders, including governors, work successfully to engage parents in the education of their children. The overwhelming majority of parents are positive about the work of the school and feel well informed about the progress of their children. Parents are encouraged to express their views about the work of the school through events such as the Chair of Governors 'drop in' sessions. They learn more

about the skills that their children develop at school through 'parents as pupils' lessons.

- Currently, students eligible for pupil premium funding make good progress. This is because they receive individualised support where relevant.
- School leaders work effectively with external partners such as the local authority and local primary schools. For example, work done with external consultants has assured leaders of the accuracy of teachers' assessments and their own judgments of teaching quality. It has also helped school leaders to establish clear priorities to improve the school's provision further.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors, under the leadership of the determined and knowledgeable Chair of Governors, are ambitious and well informed about the school's work. They hold senior leaders to account for the quality of education and care they provide. It is too soon for them to make comparisons between the school's results and national averages.
 - Evidence from governing body minutes demonstrates that governors seek the best for their students and are ready to challenge leaders on important issues, such as the quality of teaching, achievement and attendance. For example, they insist on external validation of the information that is provided to them by school leaders. This level of challenge has led to improvements in the education provided by the school, such as improved literacy support for students and more frequent communication to parents.
 - Governors take an active role in monitoring the effectiveness of the arrangements for managing the performance of teachers. They recognise that these arrangements do not yet enable leaders to measure how well teachers are reaching their objectives.
 - Governors ensure that the school's systems for ensuring students are safe are effective and that statutory safeguarding requirements are met. Leaders and managers are trained regularly, and staff are familiar with the procedures that the school uses to ensure that children are kept safe.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. This view is shared by staff, students and almost all parents. In this small school leaders know each student by name. Students feel valued members of the school community and welcome the school's innovative approaches, which contribute to its caring ethos. For example, the presence of 'Scout', the school dog, in reading sessions for more vulnerable students, adds to the sense of calm during the 'Reach for a book' sessions. This contributes to students' positive attitudes to learning.
- Relationships between students themselves and with adults are almost always characterised by tolerance, courtesy and good humour. Students are supportive of each other in lessons and this helps to create an environment in which learning can flourish.
- Students move promptly and purposefully to their lessons and arrive ready to learn in almost all cases. They make good use of the tablet computers the school provides to organise their work, particularly in tutor sessions. Their attitudes to learning are positive. In many cases students display a love of learning and an enthusiasm to take part in the activities in lessons. They ask questions confidently and talk freely about their beliefs, and offer answers to questions in lessons, knowing that their peers will respect their views.
- Students value the opportunities they have to obtain 'Reach points' through the school's very effective rewards programme. This has a positive impact upon their behaviour. Similarly, they strive to remain members of the 'Zilcho' club. These are students who have exhibited no negative behaviours throughout each school term. At the time of inspection, the majority of students were members of this club.
- The large majority of students take pride in their school and their work, which is neat and well presented. However, a small minority of students do not take enough care over their written work which can be untidy and contain careless errors.

- A small minority of students, some of whom have recently joined the school, do not always behave as well as the school expects. This behaviour is met with disapproval by their peers and is effectively addressed by adults in school.
- At breaks and lunch times, students enjoy taking part in activities such as table tennis and reading sessions in the school library. They are cheerful, polite and confident in their discussions with their peers and the adults who are supervising them.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students feel very safe and enjoy coming to school. Attendance is high and persistent absence is below national averages. There are good systems for tracking attendance and the rewards programme is valued by students.
- School records and discussions with students and staff indicate that bullying is rare. Students told inspectors that were it to occur it would be dealt with quickly and effectively. Students are aware of the different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying. They act safely in lessons and around the school site. They explained to inspectors the measures they take to keep safe online.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good overall. It has secured good progress and attainment for almost all students across the school.
- Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve, setting aspirational targets for them. With just a few exceptions, the careful planning by most teachers means that activities are well matched to the capabilities of the students, challenging and interesting them.
- Most teachers assess students' work carefully and provide feedback that is precise and enables students to make improvements their work. In the minority of cases when this feedback lacks precision, students are not clear as to how they should improve their work and this can slow their progress.
- Teachers' effective use of questioning is a feature of many lessons and this accelerates students' understanding and achievement. In a Year 8 English lesson, for example, the teacher's skilful questioning enabled students to develop their understanding of poetic devices. As a result, students confidently applied the techniques that they learned to write poetry of a standard that was higher than that typically seen at their age.
- The teaching of literacy, reading, and mathematics is generally good and has a significant impact upon students' progress. Teachers encourage students to read extensively. They do so confidently and use subject specific language in their discussions about their learning. For example, in a Year 8 humanities lesson, students were able to read sources, discuss their meaning and the conditions of slavery with confidence and thoughtful maturity.
- Teachers provide regular opportunities for students to apply their mathematical skills and understanding, both in mathematics lessons themselves and in other subjects. However, teachers do not always insist on good standards of presentation and accuracy in students' writing, or always encourage boys to be sufficiently detailed in their writing and to write in a formal style when this is appropriate.
- In many lessons, teachers develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. Students in a Year 8 English lesson, for example, developed a rapid understanding of cultural aspects that influenced the writings of a specific poet. They were able to offer considered analysis of the meaning of the poetry. In a Year 7 science lesson, students were able to reflect on their own diets as they developed a deeper knowledge and understanding of nutrition.

- Good links exist between teachers and teaching assistants, enabling them to provide effective support for those students who require this. For example, the skilful intervention of an assistant enabled students in a Year 7 humanities lesson to gain a deeper understanding of aspects of lives in different countries.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- As the school only has students in Years 7 and 8, no external, published data is available on the progress of students or on how their attainment compares to national averages.
- Students enter the school with attainment that is below that of their peers nationally and in some cases significantly so. Students make rapid progress from their individual starting points, resulting in good achievement.
- School leaders' accurate analysis of students' progress, validated by external consultants, indicates that students are working at levels that are in line with or above those typical for their age, despite their low starting points. This was confirmed by the standards of their work in books as well as the progress seen by inspectors in lessons across several subjects.
- Students who entered the school with low levels of literacy, and who are receiving additional literacy support, have made on average two years increase in their reading age in their first year at the school. Some students have improved by over three years.
- Girls enter the school with levels of attainment in English and mathematics that are generally lower than those of the boys. They make better progress than the boys from their individual starting points, and as a result have closed this gap.
- Disadvantaged students eligible for pupil premium funding make good progress from their starting points but their progress is not as strong as other groups of students in the school. They enter the school with achievement that is generally lower than that of their peers nationally and those in school.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress from their individual starting points, which are considerably lower than that of other students in school. This is due to the effective support that they receive, such as the additional literacy and numeracy sessions provided for them.
- The most-able students make strong progress in English and mathematics, often working successfully on tasks that are above the level expected for their age. This is due to the high level of challenge presented to them in lessons such as English, mathematics and humanities.
- Students who are admitted to the school during the school year do not make progress that is as rapid as their peers in school. This is due, in part, to the fact that they take time to adapt to the ethos and expectations made of them.
- The progress of students who have English as an additional language from their individual starting points is good. They quickly develop good academic language skills and are able to work at the same level as their peers.

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	139662
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	450124

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	155
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carolyn Venn
Headteacher	Richard Booth
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01923 224764
Email address	admin@reachfree.co.uk

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