

Mexborough Academy

Maple Road, Mexborough, South Yorkshire S64 9SD

Inspection dates

20–21 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The Wakefield City Academies Trust has failed to give school leaders the consistent and targeted support they have needed to overcome the weaknesses in pupils' outcomes that have existed for some time.
- Over time, the actions of the trust and school leaders have failed to address consistently poor attendance, especially that of disadvantaged pupils.
- The trust has not ensured that the local governing body has been effectively equipped to support and challenge leaders. As a result, the school's progress in addressing its weaknesses has been too slow.
- Over time, outcomes across the school, and especially for disadvantaged pupils, have been weak. This is because, historically, expectations of what all pupils can and should achieve have been too low.
- Although improving, teaching is still too variable in its quality. As a result, pupils have not made the progress that they should from their starting points.
- Staff do not make effective use of detailed information about pupils' prior learning to focus their teaching and enable pupils to make rapid progress.

The school has the following strengths

- In challenging circumstances, the headteacher has maintained a clear sense of what needs to be done to address the school's weaknesses.
- The headteacher has established a team of staff, including senior leaders, who are dedicated and increasingly well equipped to ensure that all pupils succeed.
- Although hampered by the inconsistent support of the trust, the local governing body is clear about the school's weaknesses and determined that the school should succeed.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress.
- There is a tangible sense of community and care in the school. Pupils are generally well behaved and they are respectful and alert to the needs of others.
- The number of exclusions, although still too high, has reduced significantly. Leaders have taken strong, humane and effective action to ensure that the number continues to fall.
- The curriculum is well suited to the needs of pupils. Its emphasis on building pupils' resilience is a strong and successful feature.
- Leaders are increasingly effective in checking the quality of teaching and sharing teachers' expertise. Teaching across the school is improving.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve outcomes for all pupils by ensuring that all staff:
 - have high expectations of all pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, so that they make good progress that is similar to, or exceeds, that of pupils nationally
 - consistently use the school's detailed information about pupils' skills and knowledge to refine planning and focus their teaching so that all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make the progress that they should
 - follow the agreed school policy of giving pupils regular indications of what they need to do to improve their learning, which are subsequently acted on.
- Rapidly improve attendance, including for disadvantaged pupils, so that it is at least similar to that of pupils nationally by:
 - rigorously monitoring the attendance of pupils and acting promptly to reduce absence
 - further reducing fixed-term exclusions so that these pupils spend as much time as possible in school
 - ensuring that initiatives to improve attendance, such as the work with the local authority, are very carefully and rigorously monitored by senior leaders and governors to ensure maximum impact
 - engaging more vigorously with parents and carers to ensure that they understand the importance of regular attendance
 - ensuring that the pupils' experience of school and of learning is so positive that they are eager to attend school every day.
- Improve governance by ensuring that:
 - governing body vacancies are filled and governors are carefully trained and rigorously supported
 - the findings of the review of governance are acted upon promptly and the impact of any recommended actions are measured carefully.

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

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

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The impact of leaders' and local governors' actions to address the weaknesses at the school has been considerably weakened by a lack of coherent and systematic support from Wakefield City Academies Trust (WCAT). The trust's support for leadership has been weak and inconsistent. A number of the trust-wide initiatives, such as the system for monitoring and recording pupils' progress, have not been fit for purpose and have hampered the school's ability to improve.
- In this unpromising climate, the headteacher has been resilient and imaginative in his actions and has had a positive impact on key weaknesses at the school. However, due to the poor and, sometimes, counter-productive nature of the trust's actions, leaders have not been able to address these weaknesses quickly enough.
- The school's relatively new buildings were built as part of a private finance initiative (PFI) to provide a school with space for 1,300 pupils. The current number of pupils on roll is 661. The result of this has been a significant and ongoing negative impact on the school's finances and the need for staff cuts. This has also had an adverse impact on leaders' ability to tackle key weaknesses.
- Leaders and governors work hard to promote equality of opportunity. All pupils have access to the full range of the school's opportunities. However, consistently poor attendance means that a significant minority of pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, are not doing as well as they should.
- In difficult circumstances, the headteacher has developed an energetic and skilled senior team which is well placed, with him, to tackle the weaknesses at the school. Inspection evidence shows that there is sufficient capacity in the leadership of the school to address its weaknesses.
- Leaders have high expectations of staff and pupils and a clear and accurate view of how well the school is doing. They are very aware of what needs to improve. Leaders have put in place the necessary systems to monitor and check the impact of their actions on the school's effectiveness.
- Leaders have addressed the legacy of poor behaviour and attitudes to learning that have been impediments to the school's sustained progress. This has been done through careful and diligent implementation of a school-wide behaviour and dress code which is consistently applied by staff and welcomed by the vast majority of pupils.
- Leaders have developed a clear, focused and effective set of processes to improve the quality of teaching. These involve gathering evidence about teachers' effectiveness through observation and work-sampling, and linking this with teachers' training needs and performance management. Inspection evidence shows that this approach is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching.
- Middle leaders' skills are developing strongly. They now have a clear role in improving teaching and monitoring the progress pupils make.
- Leaders have made significant and positive changes to the curriculum so that all pupils are better prepared for their next steps. With more time for English and mathematics,

the current curriculum is broad, balanced and interesting. It promotes diversity. It is underpinned by a wide range of extra-curricular activities that focus on learning, teamwork and opportunities for pupils to undertake roles of responsibility. It promotes pupils' resilience and prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

- The school's own information and inspection evidence show that leaders have used the Year 7 catch-up funding effectively to improve pupils' reading skills. However, the impact of this funding in improving the mathematics skills of Year 7 pupils is not as effective.
- Leaders' work in supporting teachers at the start of their careers is effective. Newly and recently appointed teachers receive detailed and personalised training and support to ensure that they are well versed in both school-wide issues, such as safeguarding, as well as skills associated with their subject area. These colleagues told inspectors that they really welcomed the high-quality support they have been given.
- The leadership of support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective. The leader coordinates and develops her team so that they are able to provide focused support for these pupils. She provides staff with detailed advice and training so that teachers improve their skills in this area of the school's work successfully.

Governance of the school

- The local governing body has not been able to fulfil its role effectively. The support governors have received from Wakefield City Academies Trust has been weak and inconsistent. As a result, the local governing body does not understand its role fully.
- The local governing body knows the school very well. The headteacher and his team keep the local governing body informed through high-quality reports and other information. The governing body is clear about the areas that need to be addressed in order to improve the school's effectiveness. However, it has not been able to act decisively because of the trust's variable levels of support and lack of capacity.
- The local governing body has engaged with Doncaster local authority to seek the more consistent and focused support it has not been able to secure from the trust. Officers of the local authority have responded positively to this. It is too early to judge the impact of this support.
- There are vacancies on the local governing body. This has also hampered its ability to engage fully with improving the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff at all levels are trained in safer recruitment and 'Prevent' duty strategies. Leaders maintain a culture in the school where staff show a clear understanding of their responsibilities and of the processes to keep pupils safe. As a result, staff quickly identify potentially vulnerable pupils and give them the support they need.
- Procedures for checking the suitability of visitors and staff recruitment are secure. Leaders check the suitability of staff to work with children appropriately. Leaders

quickly identify any pupil at potential risk of harm and engage appropriately with partners and local community agencies as necessary.

- Pupils have many opportunities to learn how to stay safe, through the subjects they study, tutor time and assemblies. Pupils told inspectors that they regularly learn about how to stay safe online.
- Pupils told inspectors that they have staff they can go to if they have any concerns. They are confident that adults would listen to their concerns and take prompt and appropriate action.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is inconsistent in its quality. Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of what pupils can and should do. Too often, pupils do work that is too easy for them and lacks challenge.
- Inspection evidence, including the scrutiny of pupils' books and folders, shows that the pace at which teachers cover topics varies from subject to subject and year to year. This means that there is variability in the amount and depth of work that different teachers and members of staff expect their pupils to complete.
- Some teachers do not make sufficient use of the information they have about pupils' current abilities to focus their teaching precisely on what pupils need to do to improve and make rapid progress. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils.
- Too many staff do not give pupils sufficiently detailed updates on what they need to do to improve because they do not consistently follow the school's target-setting policy. Pupils say that they are not sure how well they were doing.
- Teachers generally have good subject knowledge. Some teachers use their knowledge to fire pupils' enthusiasm and engage their interest. In these lessons, pupils took real delight in learning. However, this is not always the case and, as a result, pupils, particularly the most able pupils, do not make the progress that they should.
- Lessons are generally well planned and follow the school-wide format introduced by leaders. This format emphasises the need for teachers to ensure that pupils know the purpose and focus of their learning so that they can take an active part in classroom activities. In Year 10 in French, for example, towards the end of the session, the teacher deftly referred pupils back to their thinking at the start of the lesson in order to reflect and check their own progress. Pupils were pleased with what they had covered and learned. They told the inspector that they were looking forward to the next lesson.
- Additional adults are generally well deployed to support pupils' learning. As a result, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make generally good progress. This is particularly the case where they have a clearly defined and focused role in supporting individuals and groups of pupils. In some cases, however, additional adults are unclear about what they need to do to move pupils on in their learning, and this hinders their progress.
- Pupils enjoy warm, positive and mutually respectful relationships with their teachers. A calm and purposeful atmosphere prevails in many lessons.
- Teachers' use of questioning is a real strength. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson, for

example, the teacher used demanding and focused questioning to tease out answers from groups of pupils so that they had to make a real effort and work together to get to the solution. Pupils took real pride and pleasure in the fact that they had worked it out for themselves.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils say that they enjoy and are proud of their school. They are, generally, caring towards each other and develop a clear sense of respect for others. Pupils recognise and welcome the staff's interest in them. They wear their uniform proudly and look smart.
- Pupils report that bullying is very rare and that they understand the range of forms that bullying can take, including homophobic and cyber bullying. Pupils told inspectors that they are confident that, should incidents of bullying occur, staff at the school would deal with them promptly and effectively.
- The programme of sessions and activities to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well developed and carefully monitored. Key areas such as e-safety, healthy eating, sexual exploitation, respect and tolerance are discussed in tutor time, assemblies and 'drop down' days. Pupils report that they value this aspect of their school life because it helps them understand how to keep safe and prepare for their next steps.
- The school has an effectively structured programme of assemblies and related tutor-time activities. These help pupils to think about their responsibilities to themselves, the school and the wider community.
- The school prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain. There are opportunities for pupils to take on roles of responsibility as student leaders and to engage in a range of activities that encourage the development of confidence and insights into the wider world. There is a particular emphasis on the needs and responsibilities of living in the 'modern Mexborough' community.
- Leaders carefully, regularly and effectively monitor the safety, progress and well-being of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision at the South West Learning Centre.
- Careers and next steps work is a strength of the school. There are increasingly regular opportunities from Year 7 through to Year 11 for pupils to think about careers and meet with a range of work and learning providers at 'your future' careers fairs and other events. There is a particular focus on preparing pupils so that they can make well-informed decisions. Parents are involved in this process, particularly as pupils get older and closer to leaving the school.
- The school is an attractive place in which to learn. There is very little litter. There are well-maintained displays of pupils' work and information about clubs and activities offered by the school. These combine with subject-specific displays which support

pupils' learning.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Overall, attendance at the school is too low. The actions leaders have taken, supported by the Wakefield City Academies Trust, have not improved it. The attendance of a significant proportion of disadvantaged pupils is particularly weak. Over time, the trust's support has not been effective in addressing this key area. The school has recently engaged with Doncaster local authority for support, and officers of the authority are now helping the school. However, it is too early to judge the impact of this initiative.
- Pupils are generally well behaved and care about the needs of others. Movement around the school and at breaks and lunchtimes is generally calm. Inspectors observed a few examples of boisterous behaviour. Diligent staff dealt with these promptly and effectively. Pupils reported that there is occasional low-level disruption, but that it is dealt with and that the whole-school code of conduct is consistently applied. Pupils also said that lunchtime queues 'get crazy'. Inspectors did not see evidence of this during the inspection.
- Pupils who have attended the school for some time reported that behaviour has improved very significantly over the past two years as a result of the positive actions of the school's leaders and staff. Pupils welcome this. Year 7 pupils, new to the school, said that they felt safe and secure.
- Fixed-term exclusions, although still comparatively high, have reduced significantly over the past two years. This is a result of firm and focused action by the headteacher and his staff. Staff help pupils improve their behaviour and attitudes to school and learning with targeted and, generally, effective support. There is a humane, carefully monitored system in place to support pupils who have episodes of challenging behaviour so that they do not fall behind. Pupils who have experienced the internal exclusion facility told the lead inspector that it helped them behave better. They were very positive and complimentary about the care and support staff have given to help them improve their behaviour and attitudes to school and their learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Overall, outcomes for pupils are inadequate. This is because, over time, a significant number of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, do not make the progress that they should from their starting points. This situation is made worse by the fact that overall attendance at the school is poor. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils.
- The school's own analysis of the provisional, unvalidated outcomes for Year 11 pupils in 2017 shows significantly weaker performance in English and mathematics at GCSE than that predicted by the school. Officers of the Wakefield City Academies Trust validated the accuracy of these predictions. Outcomes were similarly weak in 2016.
- Disadvantaged pupils make slow progress. This has been the case over time. The school's use of the pupil premium has failed to have any impact on improving their

outcomes. The most able disadvantaged pupils are not reaching the highest standards because, although improving, they are not being stretched sufficiently.

- Pupils arrive at the school in Year 7 with levels of skills and knowledge that are generally below those expected. For pupils in this year whose skills in reading, writing and mathematics are not strong enough to give them full access to the curriculum, the school offers additional support. This provision is effective in reading and enables these pupils to catch up. Their progress in mathematics and writing is not as strong.
- Overall, across the school, the most able pupils do not achieve well enough. Despite some recent improvement, inspection evidence shows that, too often, the work they are set lacks challenge.
- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils is weaker than that of other pupils in the school and others nationally. The school's own information shows a slightly reduced, yet still significant, difference between the progress of disadvantaged and other pupils. Inspection evidence shows that disadvantaged pupils are beginning to make better progress. This is because the school's monitoring of all pupils' progress is more regular, accurate and secure. Most staff are using this valuable and increasingly accurate information to focus their teaching so that pupils' performance improves.
- The school's key stage 3 'resilience' curriculum is having a very positive impact on pupils' ability to face and respond effectively to challenge. Through this programme of lessons and assemblies, pupils are encouraged to explore next steps in their learning and to employ a range of strategies to deal with 'real-life' and school situations. Inspection evidence, including pupils' comments, shows that this is having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to school and learning.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and who have an education, health and care plan make generally good progress from their starting points.

School details

Unique reference number	141354
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	10036386

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	661
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Sean Gibbons and Sue Holmes (joint chairs)
Headteacher	Richard Wood
Telephone number	01709 585858
Website	www.mexboroughacademy.co.uk
Email address	admin@mexboroughacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- On 7 September 2017, the sponsor of this school, Wakefield City Academies Trust (WCAT), issued a statement to say that it had requested that the Department for Education work with it to place its academies with new sponsors. This is because the WCAT 'does not have the capacity to facilitate the rapid improvement our academies need and our students deserve'.
- The governing body of this school is also that of Montagu Primary Academy, another school in the Wakefield City Academies Trust.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- In 2016, the school did not meet the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school has no students in its sixth form this year.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is well above the national average.
- The school is receiving support from Doncaster local authority.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. There are very few from minority ethnic groups and a very few speak English as an additional language.
- The school uses an alternative provider, the South West Learning Centre, to meet the needs of some pupils who struggle to be successful in school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 32 lessons, an assembly and tutor time. Some lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher or another senior leader. Inspectors listened to pupils in key stage 3 read and talked with them about their reading experiences.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders and members of the local governing body. The lead inspector spoke with officers of the local authority on the telephone and with an officer at the South West Learning Centre. He also spoke on the telephone with the chief executive officer of the Wakefield City Academies Trust. Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including that related to safeguarding, achievement, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour and conduct at break and lunchtime.
- A wide sample of pupils' work from all year groups and a range of subjects was scrutinised.
- There were insufficient responses from parents to register on Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors did take into account 14 texts from parents about the school.
- Throughout the two days of the inspection, inspectors spoke with pupils, both formally and informally, about their learning, safety and well-being.

Inspection team

Mark Evans, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mike Tull	Her Majesty's Inspector
Fiona Dixon	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Cresswell	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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