

Grace Academy Solihull

Chapelhouse Road, Chelmsey Wood, Birmingham, West Midlands B37 5JS

Inspection dates

28–29 March 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have created an inclusive culture where pupils and staff feel valued and proud to be a part of the school community. The school is a calm and ordered environment. The quality of education has improved since the last inspection.
- Governance is strong. Governors have a range of appropriate skills and hold leaders to account robustly. Their impact on the school's rapid progress is clear.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are outstanding. Pupils are confident, respectful, and have a high awareness of how to keep themselves safe.
- Leaders of teaching, learning and assessment have established consistent systems to effectively drive improvement in pupils' progress. Lessons are well planned and meet pupils' needs. Consequently, most pupils are making good gains in their learning.
- Pupils are well behaved in lessons and around the school site. They feel safe and the vast majority enjoy school.
- Leaders plan teachers' training well, relating it directly to teachers' development needs so that their teaching and leadership skills improve.
- Pupils do not have the opportunity to study languages in school. Leaders will reintroduce languages in 2017, following very poor outcomes in the past. No pupils gained the English Baccalaureate in 2016.
- Retention in the sixth form is too low. Changes that leaders have made are beginning to address this weakness.
- Progress in key stage 4 mathematics and humanities in 2016 was weak. Leaders have addressed weak performance in these areas well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress in mathematics and humanities, by:
 - continuing to closely monitor pupils' progress in these subjects and quickly intervene to rectify weaknesses in teaching and learning
 - continuing to ensure that assessments of pupils' strengths and weaknesses are accurate
 - putting into place effective and well-targeted interventions when pupils fall behind.
- Ensure that more pupils have access to the English Baccalaureate, by:
 - offering pupils the opportunity to study a language
 - promoting the value of languages as a part of the curriculum
 - ensuring that the teaching of languages, when it is introduced, is of a high quality.
- Improve outcomes for students in the sixth form, by:
 - embedding the changes planned for the sixth form curriculum
 - monitoring the impact of the improved information, advice and guidance for present Year 11 pupils joining the sixth form to ensure that they begin the right pathway, given their prior attainment and aspirations
 - improving retention so that more pupils complete their study programmes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have high expectations of themselves, each other and of the pupils. This is demonstrated in the improvements in outcomes for pupils, behaviour and pupils' well-being since the appointment of the new principal in 2014. Many staff commented on the sense of pride they feel in working at the school. One member of staff's comment was representative of many, 'What a transformation we have seen over the last three years!' Another said, 'I am proud to work at Grace Academy and I really look forward to coming to work every day'. The vast majority of staff and parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire agreed that the school is well led and managed.
- Middle leaders have good capacity to drive improvements in their subjects. They are appreciative of the accountability that leaders and governors provide and feel that the way they are challenged is supportive and professional. They meet with senior leaders and governors regularly to discuss the progress that pupils are making in their subject. When issues with progress arise in subjects, senior leaders put effective support in place to address any shortcomings to improve the rates of progress made.
- The leaders responsible for teaching, learning and assessment ensure that teachers' training relates closely to their specific development needs. This in turn means that teachers meet pupils' needs better. Leaders visit classrooms and look at pupils' work and assessment results to suitably evaluate teachers' work, then link training to these evaluations. Teachers told inspectors that this training encourages, challenges and supports their development.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective because leaders make sure that additional funding for these pupils is wisely spent. Leaders have appointed an educational psychologist and learning support assistants and funded a mini-bus, all of which have had a positive impact. For example, there have been recent marked improvements in attendance for this group of pupils.
- The extra funding which the school receives to help pupils entering the school to catch up in literacy and numeracy has a positive impact. Leaders have used this funding creatively to both address literacy and numeracy issues, and to better engage pupils in literacy and numeracy. For example, leaders have developed a nurture group and hosted visits from engaging authors. As a result of these well-managed interventions, these pupils are making good progress.
- Leaders have established strong, effective systems to monitor all aspects of pupils' progress. These systems ensure that senior leaders, middle leaders and governors have a clear view about the progress of pupils in each subject. Leaders have rightly ensured a focus on the accuracy of assessment in order that judgements made about attainment and progress are secure. This means that teachers have a detailed overview of exactly which skills and knowledge pupils need to develop to enable them to reach their targets.
- Leaders make effective provision for pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural education through a wide range of activities which prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain. Additionally, each department has one unit of work related strongly to these aspects. For example, pupils take part in 'building healthy relationships' and

'understanding faiths and beliefs' days, and there are units on religious music, ethics, charitable aid and lifestyle choices.

- The curriculum is balanced and offers pupils at all key stages opportunities to experience and specialise in a wide range of subjects. Additionally, pupils can participate in over 20 clubs, ranging from bicycle maintenance to world cooking. However, for post-16 students, courses do not always meet their needs. Also, following very poor outcomes in the past, leaders removed languages from the curriculum entirely. Leaders have suitably addressed both of these issues. A new curriculum structure is in place for next year in the sixth form. Leaders have also appointed a new languages teacher so that Years 7 to 9 can begin to learn a language next academic year.

Governance of the school

- Following the previous inspection, the trustees replaced the local governing body with an academy improvement board (AIB). This small team of three governors has appropriate skills, challenges leaders to address issues quickly, and has overseen rapid improvements in the quality of education provided over the past two years. Governors' deep knowledge of all areas of the school's work means that they have a comprehensive overview of the school's progress, particularly what is working well and what must be improved.
- The AIB has ensured that the improvements made are sustainable. For example, it meets with each middle leader to analyse and evaluate progress data each half term. This has improved the capacity of middle leaders to understand their subjects' progress data, account for it in detail and make improvements when needed.
- The AIB governors have a good understanding of safeguarding, are appropriately trained and regularly check that records on safeguarding are properly kept.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All child protection records are kept in a well-ordered, detailed and secure way. Referral records show that leaders are tenacious in gaining the extra support needed for vulnerable pupils. All staff have undergone regular child protection and 'Prevent' duty training and this means they have a well-developed understanding of safeguarding.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the particular risks facing pupils in the locality. They have taken effective action on these, working with pupils to raise awareness and training staff so that they can be vigilant to emerging concerns locally.
- Leaders have begun a 'students safeguarding students' project. This well-designed project means that pupils work with leaders to make sure that all safeguarding documentation is easily understandable from a pupil perspective, and that pupils play a key role in encouraging their peers to speak to adults when concerns arise.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders have ensured that there is a consistency of approach and routine in each lesson; for example, in the ways tasks are set; the ways pupils are challenged and in how planning is done. This means that pupils know what to expect in lessons, and know what is expected of them. They settle to their work quickly, follow the routines and make good progress.
- Teachers plan carefully for all pupils. They have a good understanding of pupils' specific needs and the individual barriers facing individuals. For example, each teacher keeps a brief statement of each disadvantaged pupil's needs. Teachers also support higher-ability pupils within the opening minutes of each lesson to ensure that they are appropriately challenged. When topics are particularly challenging, teachers find innovative ways to make sure that pupils understand and make the progress of which they are capable. For example, in one lesson that inspectors observed the teacher used an animation to demonstrate the calculation of volumes. Pupils gained a very clear understanding of the concept being taught and could then apply this understanding to their work.
- Teachers ensure that challenge for the most able is present in every lesson. They often give pupils tasks that promote higher-order thinking. For example, in one English class pupils were asked to be highly analytical, comparing the content and structure of a piece of writing about Beyoncé and a piece about Byron. Pupils found this challenge engaging and worked hard to find similarities in these two texts from very different timeframes.
- Leaders have focused effectively on improving pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. In every lesson that inspectors observed, there were opportunities for pupils to read out loud. They did this confidently. Teachers emphasise the accurate use and spelling of key words, and the accurate use of grammar in the various subjects taught. When pupils answer teachers' questions, they do so thoughtfully, in full, using well-thought-out and grammatically correct sentences. They understand that this is the expectation and do this confidently.
- Teachers place a strong emphasis on pupils knowing what good answers look like. As a result, pupils are more able to assess their own work accurately. Inspectors saw pupils peer- and self-assessing accurately in many of the lessons they observed.
- In a small number of lessons, teachers do not use time effectively and pupils are not engaged in their work. Sometimes, while the teacher works with a group of pupils, other members of the class do not have suitable work to do. In these lessons, pupils drift off task and their progress is slow.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.

- The school is an inclusive community. Pupils from all backgrounds feel that they are a part of this community. Leaders challenge all forms of prejudice openly and constructively, and pupils have a well-developed understanding of a range of equality issues, including those related to race, faith, disability, gender, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. Groups of pupils work closely with school leaders, particularly on prejudice-based bullying. They have their own discussion groups which help leaders understand issues from pupils' perspectives.
- Pupils are proud of their school. Almost all have consistently excellent attitudes to their learning and work hard in their lessons.
- Leaders seek every opportunity to give extra personal development support to pupils when they need it. For example, the school provides expertly run six-week courses which enable groups of pupils to explore healthy relationships, personal responsibility and self-esteem. The impact of these courses is exceptional. Pupils gain the confidence to explore these matters openly and intelligently. Leaders' analysis of the impact of these sessions shows that pupils' behaviour, attendance and well-being increases and they begin to achieve more in school.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe, that the school is a positive place to be and that bullying is rare. Pupils also told inspectors that if bullying happens it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Some parents commented that they had experience of bullying being dealt with well, and one said, 'The school has policies to deal with bullying and they always follow through with them'.
- Pupils have a well-developed knowledge of a range of risks that they face, and feel confident to deal with them. This includes keeping safe online, radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders have established principles of 'restorative justice' in the behaviour and sanctions system. This means that when pupils do not meet leaders' high expectations of behaviour, pupils are encouraged to reflect deeply on it, considering the impact on other people. This effectively supports pupils' personal development and their understanding of the impact of their actions. As a result, pupils are thoughtful towards one another and the instances of repeated poor behaviour have fallen quickly.
- Some pupils are educated in alternative provision. Leaders track the attendance and welfare of these pupils closely to ensure that their placements are positive for them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They follow instructions willingly and are mature and sensible. Pupils say that this is typical.
- Low-level disruption in lessons is rare. Most pupils focus on their work, do their best and are committed to their learning. The school's logs show a marked decrease in significant poor behaviour as leaders have focused on eliminating low-level disruption. The number of fixed-term and repeat fixed-term exclusions has fallen rapidly.
- Leaders' work to improve attendance includes a mini-bus run; instant rewards for good attendance and immediate action when a group of pupils' attendance begins to fall. Consequently, the attendance of all groups is in line with the national average. Persistent absence has fallen markedly and is close to the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Overall attainment in GCSEs has improved over the last two years. This is particularly the case in English and mathematics. The percentage of pupils gaining both English and mathematics GCSE has doubled over this time. It is now above the national average.
- In 2016, overall, pupils' progress was in line with other pupils nationally who had similar starting points. This means that pupils made good progress over a range of subjects. Boys who had low prior attainment made progress which was significantly better than national averages.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding effectively to improve the attainment and progress of those that are disadvantaged. In 2016, disadvantaged pupils' progress, including that of the most able, was in line with other pupils nationally with similar starting points. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also made progress in line with other pupils nationally. In lessons that inspectors observed, current disadvantaged pupils were making progress appropriate to their starting points.
- In 2016, students in the sixth form made progress in line with national averages in both academic and applied general courses. However, disadvantaged students' progress on applied general courses was weak. Progress in psychology A level and AS-level drama were particularly strong. Pupils who joined the sixth form having not secured a GCSE in English or mathematics made progress in line with others nationally with similar starting points.
- In 2016, pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics was weak. Pupils' progress in humanities was in the bottom 10% of schools nationally. Leaders have identified the reasons for the poor progress in both subjects and put effective plans in place to ensure that this does not happen again. Inspectors evaluated work and observed lessons in these subjects over a range of year groups and teaching that previously was not good enough is now strong. The teams teaching these subjects are now more stable. Regular, moderated assessments show rapid improvements in progress for this year's Year 11 in mathematics and humanities. Current pupils have benefited from the positive changes that leaders have made over the last two years and pupils in Years 7 to 10 are making better progress than pupils in the past.
- Pupils are well prepared for their destinations. In 2016, all those who left Years 11 and 13 went on to education, employment or training. The proportion of students leaving Year 13 to go on to higher education is increasing.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The new sixth form leaders have continued to make positive changes to improve provision and outcomes for students. Their leadership is effective. Students told inspectors that they feel well supported, confident about their next steps and that they enjoy their time in the sixth form. They feel that they have good facilities, good access to computers and are treated positively as they become more independent learners.

- Sixth form students have good relationships with their teachers. In lessons, teachers often act as facilitators, allowing students the challenge and freedom of being responsible for their own learning. Students respond well to this challenge and are making good progress from their starting points.
- Sixth formers' conduct and behaviour are exemplary. They use their private study sessions maturely and are good role models for younger pupils.
- Leaders apply the same monitoring of progress to the sixth form as in Years 7 to 11. This means that where students fall behind, this is quickly spotted and effectively addressed. Sixth form leaders meet with each subject leader so that each student's progress is carefully tracked and appropriate interventions can be planned.
- Following their time in the sixth form, students go on to a range of destinations and none are left without a placement. The proportion going on to higher education has risen sharply. Students are very positive about the good advice that the careers adviser gives. All have had a one-hour consultation. Students are excited about their upcoming work experience placements.
- Retention in the sixth form is too low. Too many pupils begin Year 12 and move on to other placements, or complete Year 12 but do not move into Year 13. Leaders have put plans into place to address this issue for the coming year. They have improved information and guidance for Year 11 pupils, increased the GCSE grades needed to access some subjects and restructured the curriculum to establish two distinct post-16 pathways. While work on these changes is well designed and underway, its impact on retention is yet to be seen.

School details

Unique reference number	129342
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10025180

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	708
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	82
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	John Burton
Executive principal	Darren Gelder
Telephone number	01213 294600
Website	solihull.graceacademy.org.uk
Email address	solihull@graceacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 March 2015

Information about this school

- 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.
- The school is a smaller than average secondary school with a small sixth form. All students in the sixth form come from the school's Year 11 cohort. The school is sponsored by the Grace Academy Trust which has three secondary academies within a multi-academy trust.

- The executive principal is also the principal of Grace Academy Coventry.
- A small number of pupils are educated off site in alternative provision. The school uses Triple Crown, K2 and John Henry Newman Catholic College as education providers.
- The school meets the government's floor standards which are the minimum expectations for progress and attainment.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of lessons across a range of subjects and year groups. They scrutinised work to evaluate pupils' progress over time. They spoke to groups of pupils about their experiences, work and progress both formally and informally, at lunch and breaktimes.
- They met with senior leaders, the academy interim board, the chief executive officer, groups of subject leaders and pastoral leaders. Meetings were also held with teachers and those responsible for safeguarding, special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Inspectors evaluated the school's assessments, its information on the progress of pupils currently in the school, action plans and self-evaluation. Records about behaviour, sanctions and attendance were also scrutinised.
- Fifty-nine responses to an online staff questionnaire, 63 responses to Parent View and 33 responses to an online pupil questionnaire were also considered.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour as they arrived and left the school, in lessons, at break and lunchtimes. They also spoke with parents.

Inspection team

Dan Owen, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Buckle	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Epton	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Onyon	Ofsted Inspector

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