

Kirkby High School

Bracknell Avenue, Liverpool, Merseyside, L32 9PP

Inspection dates 3–4 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	
Leadership and management		Require improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Require improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough students achieved five GCSE grades A* to C in English and mathematics in 2014.
- Disadvantaged students and boys make slower progress than other students in the school.
- Teaching does not give students enough opportunities to explain their thinking or describe their ideas in depth. As a result, they do not write sufficiently clearly and in enough detail to attain higher standards.
- Students do not always use correct punctuation and grammar in their writing. This prevents them from attaining high standards in their written work.
- The behaviour of a very small minority of students limits the learning of others in a small number of lessons.
- Not enough students, and particularly disadvantaged students, attend well. This limits their progress and the standards they attain.
- Some subject leaders have not yet improved enough teaching in their subject so all students make good progress over time.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, managers and governors, well supported by the Trust, are leading good improvement, including raising students' achievement.
- Staff and students share the higher aspirations that are now part of the ethos of the school.
- The school's evaluation of its work is accurate.
- Staff training is well focused and is helping teachers improve their teaching successfully.
- Teaching is improving because leaders have taken effective action to eliminate weak teaching.
- Students' behaviour around the school is good. The school is orderly and students treat each other and adults with consideration.
- The school represents a safe, caring and inclusive community.
- Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good.
- Governance is good.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a wide range of subjects taught to different age groups across the school. Four teaching sessions were observed jointly with members of the school’s senior leadership team.
- Inspectors looked closely at a range of students’ written work across different subjects and year groups. They observed behaviour around the school when students moved from one lesson to another, at break time and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors met with the Executive Headteacher, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, groups of teachers, and formally with groups of students. Inspectors also talked to students informally around the school and talked to students in lessons about their work. An inspector spoke on the telephone with the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and with the leader of an alternative provision setting.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including policies, the school's evaluation of its work and its plans to improve, assessments of students' attainment and progress, information on attendance, records of behaviour and safeguarding, records of the monitoring of teaching and learning, and of the management of teachers' performance, and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors reviewed the 31 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and the school's own records of student, parent and staff views. They also took account of the 32 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Nell Banfield, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Stephen Wall

Additional Inspector

Jeremy Haigh

Additional Inspector

Janet Peckett

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Kirkby High School is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. It is part of the Rowan Learning Trust.
- The school converted to become an academy in September 2013.
- Since September 2013, a number of teachers and three senior leaders have left the school and a new deputy headteacher and several new teachers have been appointed.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported by pupil premium funding (additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority), is more than twice the national average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is much smaller than the national average.
- In 2014, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- A number of students from Years 10 and 11 attend courses away from the school site for some or all of their time. The alternative providers are Molden Training, Skillbridge, MVL, Walton Youth Project, Active TT, Adapt, Western Skills Centre and Meadow Park School, which is a pupil referral unit.
- The school is a Teaching Leaders Partner School and serves on the Regional Headteacher Council for Teaching Leaders. One member of the governing body is a national leader of governance.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all students, particularly boys and disadvantaged students, make faster progress by:
 - planning learning so that students can reflect on their thinking, share their ideas and explain their understanding in more detail, including in their writing
 - providing more opportunities for extended writing and a sharper focus on accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Improve behaviour further so that all students have positive attitudes to their learning. Do this by ensuring that staff respond to the inappropriate behaviour of a small minority of students with prompt and decisive application of the school's behaviour policy.
- Continue the drive to improve attendance, especially for disadvantaged students, by:
 - reducing the currently high levels of unauthorised absence and fixed-term exclusions
 - ensuring that improved attendance continues to be recognised and rewarded.
- Improve leadership and management further by making sure that middle leaders increase the rate of progress of students in their subject as a result of consistently good teaching.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership requires improvement because not enough teaching is consistently good. Although the headteacher, senior leaders and governors have taken concerted and appropriate action to improve teaching and raise standards, not enough students make good progress and achieve well enough over time. Students' literacy skills, particularly in their written work, are not of a sufficient standard for them to be able to show what they know in more extended pieces of writing and in their examination answers.
- The headteacher, senior and middle leaders, the governing body and the Trust are implementing clear plans to improve, which are resulting in improving teaching. Much of the inadequate teaching has been eliminated and an increasing proportion of teaching is helping more students to make rapid progress.
- Leaders from other schools in the Trust have supported the school effectively in helping middle leaders to improve their leadership, including improving teaching in their subject, so that more students are beginning to make better progress. Middle leaders speak positively about the support they have received but the impact of improved subject leadership has not improved teaching sufficiently across all subjects so that teaching is consistently good.
- The procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching have improved since the school became an academy. Leaders now have a more accurate view of the overall quality of teaching in the school and of what aspects still need to improve. Teachers have been well supported in developing confidence in teaching GCSE courses in their subject. For many, their previous experience was of vocational courses with different teaching and assessment requirements.
- Subject leaders review teaching and progress in their subject regularly and these reviews are focused, honest and unflinching in identifying where weaknesses remain. Suitably detailed and focused action plans include effective steps to improve those areas, which are beginning to have an impact on improving teaching.
- The school has detailed information about the progress students are making, so leaders can see which students are making more rapid progress and where students are not catching up fast enough. There are extensive additional teaching and revision sessions to ensure that students continue to make progress. Students have recently asked for Saturday morning revision sessions to help them prepare for the current examinations. Although boys and disadvantaged students are making better progress as a result of extra teaching, they have not accelerated their progress as much as girls and non-disadvantaged students respectively.
- Senior managers check on the accuracy of teachers' assessments. Teachers also check them with other staff in the school and with leaders and teachers in the other Trust schools. As a result, most teachers' assessments are accurate and reliable. The current reports to parents are clear and helpfully summarise pastoral information about behaviour, attitudes and attendance, as well as information about the progress students are making towards their targets.
- Additional pupil premium funding is used well for one-to-one or small-group support to improve their work and for support to improve attendance. Helpful counselling and guidance from pastoral staff is provided if a student is distracted from their work by more personal issues. Year 7 catch-up funding is used to provide additional teaching to improve the reading skills of students who arrive with low reading levels. A comprehensive and structured reading programme is in place for September 2015, so that students can improve their reading even more rapidly.
- The current curriculum is the result of significant changes made in 2013 and 2014. There are now significantly fewer vocational courses and more GCSE courses offered for study, so students have a wider choice of careers and courses at college or sixth form after Year 11. The choices students make in Year 9 of subjects to study in Key Stage 4 are explained carefully and painstakingly to students and to their parents individually, so the most suitable routes can be followed for each student. Students are well prepared for the future career choices they might make.
- Activities to promote students' personal development are good. Students discuss current issues, such as domestic violence, attitudes to people with different sexual orientation, what our planet might look like in the future, and respond to a weekly news website in form time each week. They sample and cook foods from different cultures, explore human behaviour and 'the human condition' in history, discussing how events in Auschwitz in the Second World War could have felt at the time from the perspectives of perpetrators and victims of the events. Social and moral awareness is well developed. Cultural and spiritual development is equally strong. It is developed through visiting speakers and trips to museums, and through art, performing arts and music, where students learn about different artists and explore how to play the didgeridoo.
- During the recent elections, students nominated candidates and held a similar election in school. They

learned about how British democracy works, what British people believe in and why people might vote for one party or another. This prepares students well for life in modern Britain.

- The overriding school value is respect for themselves and others. The combination of good provision for personal development and the respect ethic embedded into the day-to-day life of the school, ensure that relationships are harmonious. Derogatory and discriminatory language are rare, including any casual use of homophobic language. The provision is evidence that leaders have a clear commitment to equality of opportunity and support all students to succeed within the school.
- Careers guidance is good. Students and their parents are helped effectively to make subject choices in Year 9 and in choosing different routes to careers after Year 11.
- The school tracks and checks on the progress, attendance behaviour and safety of students who follow courses away from the school site thoroughly through regular communication and visits to the providers.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Staff are well trained and supported in keeping themselves and students safe.
- The Trust gives good support to the school. It has provided additional capacity to improve standards and increase the progress of all groups of students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors were led in 2014 by a National Leader of Governance (NLG). A new Chair of the Governing Body is now in place, but the NLG remains on the governing body. In addition, governors have strong education and business expertise, supplemented by additional training for their roles. They are well placed to support and challenge the school effectively and minutes of governing body meetings indicate that they do so.
 - Governors understand the school's data and how they are used to check on students' progress, including the progress of disadvantaged students. They know what the additional pupil premium funding is spent on. They use the data to evaluate its impact on increasing the progress of disadvantaged students.
 - Governors are keenly aware of where teaching is improving and where it remains less strong. They ensure that any move of staff to upper pay scales are justified by improved student progress and effective teaching.
 - Governors manage finances well and have supported the school well through changes in curriculum and assessment.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Although most students behave consistently well around school, and the majority have good attitudes to learning, a small minority of students, particularly boys, do not show the same self-discipline. They do not concentrate or apply themselves to their work, and distract others.
- Not all staff apply the school's behaviour policy quickly enough when students call out or talk when the teacher is talking. As a result, the learning of others slows as they try harder to listen to the teaching and the explanations about what they need to do.
- Students show respect to others and to adults when moving around school, in the dining room and at lunch and break times. They very much appreciate the informed and effective support and advice they know they can rely on from staff, and older students are proud of their roles in supporting and helping younger students.
- Behaviour has improved over time and the number of incidents of poor behaviour has reduced. The number of students excluded from school for inappropriate or unsafe behaviour, although still higher than national averages, is reducing as students learn to meet the higher expectations for behaviour.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students who have struggled to keep up with work or who have experienced additional personal or school-related difficulties spoke warmly of the support they received from staff, including a counsellor and the school police officer. This skilled support enables these students to manage their difficulties effectively and gives them confidence and resilience to manage future issues successfully.
- The school has made sure that students are taught effectively and regularly about how to keep themselves safe. Students have a very clear understanding of how to use social networking sites and

mobile phones safely. They know what to do if these technologies are misused or used to bully or intimidate.

- Students talk knowledgeably about extremism and exploitation. They are able to reflect and discuss current events in relation to these issues with real understanding.
- Students say they feel safe and well supervised in school; the vast majority of parents and staff agree.
- The school has improved attendance over time and rates of attendance are now close to the national average. However, too many students are still absent for unauthorised reasons, despite the school's comprehensive work with families. Students are punctual to lessons.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, although it is improving, it is not consistently good across year groups and subjects.
- Teachers explain concepts and topics, but do not plan opportunities for students to answer in detail or ask additional questions. Consequently, students do not explain further what they know and contribute answers or ideas; not enough students can talk in depth or detail about their learning. This limits the quality of their writing and teachers are less able to evaluate exactly how much students understand about what is being taught.
- Although students, especially in Key Stage 3, are improving their reading skills, the standard of many students' written work is below average. Many students spell commonly used words incorrectly, omit simple punctuation and do not have a wide vocabulary at their fingertips. This means they cannot always describe more complex ideas or explain processes clearly and accurately, for example a chemical reaction in science or the aspects of a character in an English text. This limits their ability to achieve higher standards.
- There has been some focus on linking common mathematical processes across subjects, such as bar graphs in science, history and geography, but the stronger focus currently is on improving reading skills. Mathematics teaching is becoming stronger. Part of the subject's development is to embed approaches in teaching across subjects that will help students see the useful applications of mathematical processes.
- Where teaching is highly engaging, and students are interested in finding out more and in working with their peers to share and explain what they know to other students, they gain new knowledge and develop their understanding. In a food technology lesson, students were given a word bank of foods from other cultures. They could see how the words were spelt and could find the one they needed to name new foods, such as sauerkraut and different and unusual spices. They were highly engaged in tasting the foods and using the word bank to record the tastes, appearances and textures. Students were able to use adjectives such as 'aromatic' and 'spicy' and say more than just 'I don't like it' but say 'I don't like the flavour, it's too strong and unpleasant'.
- Students' work is generally well marked. The school is introducing a structure for students to respond to teacher feedback on their work, which is increasingly evident across subjects. Students say this is helpful in making sure they know what they need to do to improve their work, and in giving them additional support if they do not understand something fully. Homework is set regularly and students know the consequence for not completing the useful homework tasks set.
- Teaching assistants are used well to make sure that students stay on task, to encourage students with less confidence to answer questions, and to help students to understand what they need to do.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Most students arrive at the school working at standards well below those of most students nationally. From their starting points, students are beginning to make faster progress. While boys and disadvantaged students are increasing their rate progress and the standard of their work, particularly in English and mathematics, these still lag behind other students in the school.
- Results in a number of subjects, including in English and mathematics, declined significantly in 2014. This was partly due to changes in entry to courses but also because of the move to a new curriculum which included more GCSE courses and fewer non-GCSE courses. Teachers are increasingly confident with teaching GCSE courses in the new curriculum. As a result, standards of students' work, including in Year 11 in English and mathematics, are rising.
- The school has reliable evidence from assessments and from students' work to demonstrate that the progress of students of all abilities, including the most-able students, boys and disadvantaged students, is

set to improve to closer to national averages in 2015. However, girls are making faster progress than boys because they are responding more quickly to the school's actions to raise standards.

- Early entry has been used in the past to enable students to practise answering examination questions, to check on what students knew and how clearly they could answer the examination questions. Many students improved their grades in English and mathematics by re-taking examinations in 2014. However, leaders and managers now have a clear idea of how well students are doing from their assessments and so have not entered Year 11 students early.
- Achievement in a number of subjects was low in 2014. It is improving this year in most subjects because more teaching is stronger across the school.
- The school's assessments and checks on students' written work indicate that an increased number of the most able students are achieving the higher levels by Year 9, so they are now well placed to achieve the standards they are capable of in Year 11. The school's analysis of progress made by Year 11 students indicates that an increased number of the most able students is set to reach higher standards.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress in their literacy skills, as a result of the regular use of specialist resources and good support provided for them in smaller classes and from teaching assistants.
- The school's use of pupil premium funding is effective in increasing the progress of disadvantaged students, including in English and mathematics, but they are still achieving standards below those of non-disadvantaged students in the school and nationally. In 2014, disadvantaged students achieved one GCSE grade lower than other students in the school and one and a half GCSE grades lower than other students nationally, in both mathematics and English. The school's figures for achievement in 2015 show that a higher proportion of disadvantaged students are expected to achieve Grade C in English and in mathematics and gaps between the achievement of different groups are closing.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to provide extra teaching and support for improving literacy, and the literacy assessments show this is effective. The school is introducing a wider structured literacy programme in September 2015, which is designed to improve the literacy skills of Years 7 and 8 students.
- Students educated away from the school site for some or all of the time are making good progress in the courses they follow. This is because the courses and settings are well chosen are well suited to their needs, and their progress is monitored closely and regularly by the school and the setting.

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	140001
Local authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	450110

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	781
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bob Downing
Headteacher	William Leyland
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
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