

The Royal School, Wolverhampton

Penn Road, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV3 0EG

Inspection dates

2 to 3 July 2019

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| 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 |
| Early years provision | Good |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Senior leaders and governors are ambitious for the school. They have ensured that high standards and the school's distinctive ethos have been maintained throughout a period of rapid expansion since 2016.
- The curriculum is supplemented by an exceptionally broad range of additional activities and opportunities. Together, these contribute very strongly to pupils' personal development. Pupils of all ages enthusiastically embrace all the school has to offer them.
- Staff provide high-quality support for vulnerable pupils, including children looked after and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These pupils make good academic progress and are well prepared for their next stage of learning.
- Throughout the school, pupils behave well. They are courteous, polite and well-mannered. They apply themselves well in lessons and have strong attitudes to learning. Attendance is consistently higher than the national average in both the primary and secondary schools.
- Teaching is effective throughout the school. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. Relationships are strong, and teachers use their good subject knowledge well to explain new ideas and concepts.
- A minority of teaching remains a little weaker. Here, teachers do not always use information about pupils' abilities, including what pupils already know, as well as they could when planning lessons.
- Pupils make good progress in all key stages. Recent weaknesses in key stage 2 and the sixth form have been eliminated.
- The early years provides children with a good start to school. Strong leadership and effective teaching means that children make good progress in all areas of learning, particularly in early reading and writing. They are well prepared to move to Year 1.
- The sixth form prepares students well for life after school. Teaching is strong. Well-planned study programmes ensure that students develop excellent social and employability skills. Sixth formers provide excellent role models for younger pupils.
- Members of the governing board possess considerable expertise. They are knowledgeable and fully committed to the school's ethos.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching so that pupils in all years make good or better progress by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - plan activities that are well matched to pupils' abilities, especially for the most able pupils
 - use information about what pupils already know and understand when planning lessons.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal, supported well by senior leaders and governors, provides clear and direct leadership. Senior leaders and governors are ambitious and committed to providing pupils with a broad and rich variety of experiences in school, in addition to a high-quality academic education. They are as dedicated to developing pupils' self-confidence, values, attitudes and employability skills as they are to ensuring that pupils achieve appropriate academic qualifications. The school is successful in achieving these aims.
- Since it opened as a free school in 2016, the school has trebled in size and now has more than 1200 pupils. Leaders and governors have managed this rapid growth exceptionally well. During this time, there have been major building works around the site and several year groups have been taught in temporary or cramped conditions. Despite these challenges, leaders have maintained a good standard of education throughout the school. The large number of pupils joining almost all year groups have settled quickly and now feel they belong to the school. They accept the school's high expectations and they value all that it has to offer. Pupils are very proud of their school.
- In the primary school, the curriculum beyond English and mathematics is taught through topics that change each half term. Topics are well planned to ensure that pupils acquire key knowledge. There is a strong emphasis on practical learning. All topics include visits off-site, visiting speakers or practical experiences in school. For example, as part of a 'stargazers' topic', pupils visited the National Space Centre in Leicester. Here they learned about rockets, propulsion and momentum. Back in school, pupils constructed their own rockets and models of the solar system. As part of 'a child's war', pupils learned about the second world war, including the blitz. An outside speaker, who had lived through the war in Germany, provided a memorable insight into the reality of war. The curriculum engages and excites pupils. They are enthusiastic learners who remember what they have been taught.
- In the secondary school, the curriculum provides pupils with a traditional and appropriate balance of academic subjects. In key stage 4, approximately two-thirds of pupils study the full range of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate. This is much higher than the national average. Throughout key stages 3 and 4, all pupils take a very wide range of enrichment activities during 'period 7', which runs for an hour at the end of each school day except Friday. Examples of 'period 7' activities include many sporting and musical activities, baking, debating, go-cart building and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Many pupils choose to join the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) that runs in partnership with the Ministry of Defence and two local schools. In the primary school, 'period 7' is optional, but almost all pupils choose to take part.
- The school's ethos, high expectations and exceptionally rich curriculum contribute strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is increasingly recognised by parents, and the school is heavily over-subscribed.
- Although leaders know the school well, their evaluation of its effectiveness has been a little overgenerous in some areas, including the quality of teaching and pupils'

outcomes. Until recently, systems to judge the effectiveness of teaching have not drawn sufficiently on evidence of the impact that teaching has on pupils' progress over time, focusing instead on the actions that teachers take in an observed lesson. Despite this, leaders know where teaching is stronger and weaker, and they take effective action to address weak teaching when it occurs. Most staff who responded to the inspection survey agreed that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement.

- Middle leaders in both the primary and secondary schools form enthusiastic and committed teams. Primary-phase leaders and secondary subject leaders understand their roles well. They carry out a range of appropriate activities to check on teaching and learning in their areas. They provide valuable training for colleagues.
- Provision for pupils with SEND is led well. Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are identified quickly when they join the school, in whichever year that might be. Leaders provide teachers with helpful information about pupils' needs and how to meet these in lessons. Teachers make good use of this information. Leaders carefully check on pupils' progress and put into place effective, extra support when it is needed, making use of a range of outside agencies when appropriate.
- Highly-effective pastoral support, especially for vulnerable pupils, is a strength of the school. In addition to pupils with SEND, the school has many other vulnerable pupils including more than 20 children looked after, several unaccompanied asylum seekers and a smaller-than-average but increasing number of disadvantaged pupils. Staff know these pupils, and their needs, very well. They use additional funding, including the pupil premium, effectively in order to provide additional support and to ensure that they have exactly the same access to the school's opportunities as all other pupils.
- Leaders and governors are clear that providing the best possible care for vulnerable pupils is part of the school's mission and a direct link to its history, its predecessor school having been founded in 1850 as a school for children orphaned by the recent cholera epidemic.

Governance of the school

- The governing board contains members with a wide range of experience and expertise, including in education and finance. Governors provide close scrutiny of many areas of the school's performance and have successfully overseen the school's trebling in size over three years.
- Governors carry out their statutory duties diligently. They check that safeguarding arrangements are effective, and they scrutinise leaders' use of additional funding, including the pupil premium. They always seek to check on the impact that actions are having, rather than simply checking that actions have taken place.
- Until recently, governors have shared leaders' overgenerous view of some aspects of the school, including the quality of teaching.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- Leaders ensure that safeguarding has a sufficiently high profile throughout the school. All policies and procedures are clear, well understood and fit for purpose. Staff are alert to the signs that pupils might need extra help because leaders provide regular training and updates. Leaders ensure that training is targeted to issues that arise in Wolverhampton. For example, staff have been trained on subjects including extremism, child sexual exploitation and county lines.
- Staff pass on to leaders any concerns they have about pupils. Leaders deal with these speedily, taking advice and involving outside agencies appropriately. Records relating to child protection are thorough, well organised and stored securely.
- The great majority of parents who completed Parent View agreed that their children are safe in school, as did almost all staff who responded to their online inspection survey.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good throughout the school. Pupils learn well and make good progress in almost all years. In the primary school, teaching is a little stronger in key stage 2 than in key stage 1. In the secondary school, it is stronger in key stage 4 than in key stage 3. However, the differences are not significant and strong practice exists in all key stages.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Teachers know pupils well and most staff have high expectations. Pupils like and trust their teachers. Consequently, pupils are happy to tackle demanding work, answer questions and contribute to discussions, secure in the knowledge they have their teachers' support and confidence.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use this well when explaining new concepts and ideas. They communicate a love of learning and of their subjects to pupils. Pupils respond positively to their teachers' enthusiasm.
- Most teachers use questioning well to deepen pupils' understanding of their work. They expect pupils to give detailed answers to questions, and they draw out more precise responses when pupils give brief or shallow answers. Similarly, teachers use questioning well to check that pupils understand their work. When they notice that a pupil is struggling, they are quick to intervene with extra help.
- There are no common weaknesses in teaching across the school. However, there is less consistency, in each key stage, in one or two aspects of teaching. Some teachers do not provide pupils, especially the most able, with sufficiently challenging work. Consequently, pupils sometimes find tasks too easy and learn less than they could as a result. Similarly, teachers do not always ensure that work builds well on what pupils have learned previously. So, at times, pupils are presented with tasks they cannot complete because they do not have a secure understanding of what they have previously been taught.
- Pupils with SEND are taught well throughout the school. Teachers generally make good use of the information they are given about these pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils can tackle the work set. Teaching assistants provide valuable support in class. Careful checks on these pupils' progress mean that staff step in with extra support, often provided to a small group, whenever pupils are struggling with their work.

- Reading is promoted well throughout the school. Phonics are taught well in the early years and in key stage 1. Many pupils are enthusiastic readers who make good use of the school's attractive and well-stocked library.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The curriculum, supplemented by an exceptional range of additional activities, visits and opportunities, contributes strongly to pupils' personal development in all years. Consequently, pupils are mature and articulate. Most have excellent attitudes to learning. During the inspection, many pupils enthusiastically shared with inspectors details about what they were learning.
- Pupils are thoughtful and considerate of others' views. They discuss and debate maturely. They see the school's diverse population as a strength. The school is a harmonious, multi-cultural community where equality of opportunity is enshrined in all areas of school life.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through many activities within the curriculum and a well-planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme. For example, pupils in Year 5 recently took part in an anti-bullying workshop. They used virtual-reality headsets to view examples of bullying. They then discussed their responses to what they had seen. Teaching about online safety is thorough and regular. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the risks of using the internet and social media and how to protect themselves.
- Inspectors spoke with many pupils during the inspection. All confirmed that they feel safe in school. They told inspectors that bullying is very rare and that any bullying that does happen is dealt with speedily and effectively. Pupils have confidence in the school's adults to support them with any problems they face. They feel safe and well cared for in school.
- The school's careers education programme is strong and ensures that pupils are well informed and supported at all stages of their education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. The behaviour of most pupils is exemplary. They are enthusiastic learners who are keen to succeed. However, occasionally and invariably when tasks were not well matched to pupils' abilities, some low-level disruption was evident in lessons during the inspection. Through Parent View and the online staff inspection survey, approximately 20% of parents and a smaller percentage of staff expressed some concerns about behaviour in the school. Inspectors found no evidence to support these concerns.
- Incidents of disruptive or serious misbehaviour are very rare. Consequently, the school's use of exclusion as a sanction is below average in both the primary and the

secondary schools.

- Pupils enjoy school and attendance is higher than average in both the primary and the secondary schools. Almost all pupils attend school very regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress throughout the school.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check was above average in 2018. Phonics are taught well in Reception and key stage 1. Pupils make a strong start to reading.
- By the end of key stage 1, pupils' attainment at the expected level is above average in reading, writing and mathematics. At greater depth, pupils' attainment is above average in mathematics and broadly average in reading and writing.
- Outcomes at the end of key stage 2 have had some weaknesses in recent years, especially in writing and, to a lesser extent, in mathematics. Published progress data for writing and mathematics was below average in 2018. It was broadly average in reading. Although attainment was above average at the expected level in each of reading, writing and mathematics, it was below average at greater depth in both writing and mathematics. Pupils currently in key stage 2 are now making good progress in all subjects.
- Pupils' progress by the end of Year 11 has been good in the last two years. Pupils' attainment has been broadly average, although the proportion of pupils achieving top GCSE grades has been a little below average in some subjects, including English, history, German and computer science. Pupils achieve well in several subjects, including art, geography and chemistry. A much higher-than-average proportion of pupils achieved the English Baccalaureate in 2018.
- Vulnerable pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, those with SEND and children looked after, make good progress in all key stages. Effective teaching and well-targeted, extra support ensure that they do not fall behind their peers.

Early years provision

Good

- Strong leadership of this area has successfully overseen the rapid growth in provision from just 11 children in 2016 to the 90 children now in the three Reception classes. Leaders have maintained a good standard of provision through successful recruitment of staff and effective training.
- Teaching is effective. Teachers provide an appropriate range of activities in all areas of learning. Teachers know children well and activities are well matched to their abilities and needs. Well-designed activities to develop children's fine and gross motor skills ensure that children make strong progress in their physical development. The outdoor area is of a high quality and is used well. Phonics are taught well, and children make a strong start to reading and writing as a result. Reception is a language-rich environment where children learn to enjoy reading. Adult-initiated activities tend to be more effective in promoting learning than activities initiated by children. This is because children tend to be a little over reliant on adults and do not access these

activities independently as effectively as they might.

- Children make good progress from their starting points in all areas of learning. Assessment is accurate, and teachers use this information well to decide what each child's next steps should be. The proportion of pupils achieving a good level of development is above average, and children are well prepared to start Year 1.
- Appropriate support is provided for any children who need it. For example, children with SEND are identified quickly and supported well. Children who speak English as an additional language are supported appropriately, according to their stage of English acquisition.
- Children behave well and have good attitudes to learning. They play together sensibly, taking turns and listening to their friends. Safeguarding is effective, and all staff understand that keeping children safe is their top priority. All welfare requirements are met.
- Parents are welcomed into Reception. Staff work hard to involve parents in their children's education. A small, but increasing proportion contribute information for their children's learning journals.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form has improved this year. Outcomes in some A-level courses were weak in 2018 because of weak teaching. Additionally, a small number of students took A-level courses that were not appropriate, given their ability. These areas have been fully addressed and current students are making good progress on their courses. Progress is strong in several subjects, including biology, business studies, geography and German. It remains weaker in physics, but even here it is improving strongly.
- Having considered the abilities of pupils currently in key stage 4, leaders have reviewed the post-16 curriculum. They have identified vocational courses that will better meet some pupils' needs when they join the sixth form. These vocational courses are set to begin in September 2019.
- Teaching is now consistently strong in the sixth form. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to explain new ideas well. They plan activities that challenge all students, and they use questioning well to deepen students' understanding of the concepts they are studying.
- The school provides effective and independent careers guidance as part of a well-planned PSHE education programme. Most students take up university places when they leave the sixth form, and they are supported well throughout the application process.
- Students enjoy the sixth form. They value the teaching they receive and the wide range of opportunities the sixth form offers. Almost all students complete their courses and attendance is high.
- Students undertake a wide range of non-qualification activity that contributes well to developing students' confidence and employability skills. Many students take part in sporting activities, music, drama, the CCF and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Many students take advantage of leadership opportunities, both in school and in the local community. Most students take advantage of opportunities to experience the

world of work during their course. Leaders recognise that ensuring that all students benefit from appropriate, work-related learning is an area they need to develop further.

- Students' behaviour is exemplary. They provide excellent role models for pupils in the main school. They are considerate and mature. They have excellent attitudes to learning. For example, inspectors observed students debating the events in 1930s Germany that preceded Hitler's 'final solution'. Students presented intelligent, informed and mature opinions, with several speaking English as an additional language.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 143101 |
| Local authority | Wolverhampton |
| Inspection number | 10088458 |

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

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| Type of school | All-through |
| School category | Academy free school |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1251 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 175 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Peter Hill |
| Principal | Mark Heywood |
| Telephone number | 01902 341230 |
| Website | https://theroyalschool.co.uk/ |
| Email address | mh@theroyal.school |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- The school opened as a free school in September 2016. Its predecessor was an independent school.
- Since the school opened as a free school, it has trebled in size from approximately 400 pupils to 1250 pupils.
- The school has below-average proportions of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- The school makes no use of alternative provision.
- The school has boarding provision for up to 120 pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons. Most of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to many pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. Inspectors observed pupils at breaktimes, lunchtimes and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors visited an assembly.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised, including information relating to governance, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching.
- Meetings were held with the principal, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers.
- The lead inspector met with eight governors, including the chair and the vice-chair of the governing board.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views by considering the 169 responses to Parent View, including the 101 'free text' comments.
- Inspectors considered the 92 responses from staff to Ofsted's survey.

Inspection team

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|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Alun Williams, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Josie Leese | Ofsted Inspector |
| Michael Onyon | Ofsted Inspector |
| Huw Bishop | Ofsted Inspector |
| Paul Heery | Ofsted Inspector |

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