

Ipswich Academy

Braziers Wood Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 0SP

Inspection dates

18–19 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching remains too inconsistent. A significant proportion of staff are inexperienced or new to the school this year. Some are in the early stages of developing their teaching. Not all staff have a full understanding of the school's procedures for teaching and assessing pupils' work.
- In their first year, school leaders rightly prioritised raising pupils' achievement in Year 11. The rapid improvements made to their progress and attainment, including disadvantaged pupils, are impressive, but do not extend to all other year groups.
- Pupils do not achieve well enough in science and a small number of foundation subjects.
- Significant improvements in behaviour are undermined by a small minority of pupils who disrupt the learning of others in lessons.
- The most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged in a majority of lessons. Some of these pupils feel that they could be pushed harder to do their very best.
- The quality of girls' written work and presentation skills is generally much better than those of boys. Not all teachers check that work is tidy, complete and presented well.
- The quality of teachers' marking and feedback varies too widely. Pupils say that they would like good advice in all subjects to help them improve their work.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors have transformed the school and the quality of education provided for pupils.
- Weaknesses in teaching are dealt with systematically. Leaders' expectations of pupils and staff are very high.
- The sharing of best practice and resources across the trust is increasing the school's capacity to improve further.
- Standards are rising quickly. A much higher proportion of pupils attained good GCSE and vocational qualifications this year.
- Procedures to safeguard pupils and protect them from harm are robust and meticulously maintained.
- Pupils say that the school is a safe, friendly place to be. They speak positively about the recent improvements made, and the quality of care, guidance and support provided for them.
- Attendance is improving. Fewer pupils have been excluded from school this year.
- Events to enrich pupils' experiences and broaden their horizons are greatly appreciated by pupils and their parents.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make further improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that inexperienced and new staff establish themselves quickly and develop a thorough understanding of the agreed procedures for teaching and assessing pupils' work
 - strengthening procedures to correct basic spelling and grammatical errors in pupils' work in both key stages
 - provide further help for pupils with poor handwriting skills, particularly boys, so that their work is legible, error free and well presented
 - providing all pupils with good-quality feedback, in line with the school's policy, to help them improve their work.
- Eradicate low-level disruption in lessons caused by a small minority of pupils.
- Raise pupils' achievement further by:
 - extending the approaches used to accelerate the progress and attainment of pupils in Year 11 last year, throughout key stages 3 and 4
 - ensuring that new procedures to assess pupils' progress throughout key stage 3 become firmly embedded in all subjects and the information gained from these assessments is used effectively
 - eradicating the wide variation in pupil outcomes, particularly in science and some foundation subjects
 - checking that the most able pupils are provided with sufficiently challenging work in all lessons.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- When Paradigm Trust (the trust) took control of the school, it was already in special measures. All aspects of its work were inadequate. High-quality leadership reported in previous Ofsted monitoring inspections since September 2015 has transformed this school.
- Leaders and staff share the same vision and ambition, and show a relentless drive to improve the school further and provide pupils with a good education.
- Senior leaders rightly prioritised making immediate improvements to the quality of teaching and learning, and ensuring that pupils in their final year were suitably prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. They have done what they set out to do. The quality of teaching is better. Standards are rising quickly.
- Determined action by the executive principal, ably supported by her team of senior leaders, has made the overall quality of teaching much better than it has been in the past. She has overcome staff recruitment difficulties in the local area by appointing a range of unqualified and newly qualified staff, and giving them the support they need to develop their practice.
- Regular training and routine monitoring of lessons are increasing the effectiveness of new teaching staff. Expectations of all staff are much higher. All staff are held fully accountable by the executive principal. Those members of staff who were unable to meet leaders' higher expectations have left the school.
- Clear, coherent leadership has underpinned these and other rapid improvements. Attendance is rising. Routine, systematic monitoring of pupils' behaviour and clear sanctions for those who struggle to meet the raised expectations make the school a calmer and safe place to be.
- Self-evaluation is largely accurate and this informs detailed plans for improvement.
- Recent training for middle leaders is empowering them to lead improvements to the quality of provision. Due to the departure of some middle leaders, temporary arrangements are in place in English and mathematics until new appointments are made this term.
- A broad, balanced curriculum provides pupils with a wide choice of academic subjects and some vocational learning. Weaknesses in the quality of teaching in the past mean that pupils have not been suitably prepared for the English Baccalaureate qualification. Consequently, the proportion of pupils who are entered for this award is low.
- Enrichment activities such as off-site visits to London and revision weekends are valued highly by pupils, and are also helping to forge stronger links with parents. However, the range of other artistic, creative and sporting opportunities is too limited.
- Prioritising immediate improvements to teaching and raising achievement has restricted the time and resources spent on developing other aspects of the school's work. Much less attention has been paid to raising pupils' achievement in key stage 3.
- Action plans are currently in place to enhance the quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Pupils are taught about democracy, law, respect and tolerance in a range of subjects, but their overall understanding of British values remains under-developed.

Governance of the school

- The trust board provides professional, astute governance. They bring a broad range of expertise to the school.
- Members of the board share the commitment and ambition of leaders to make significant, sustainable improvements to the school.
- They are adept at using the combined resources of other schools within the trust to strengthen provision and provide greater capacity to lead improvement. For example, highly effective practitioners from other schools in the trust make weekly visits to work alongside staff. A leader from another trust school is training and supporting a teacher who, in time, will take over the coordination of special educational needs. Additional leaders are deployed to monitor and evaluate the school's work, and report their findings to senior leaders.
- Members of the board also serve on the school's interim executive board, alongside local governors. They meet regularly to evaluate the rate of improvement made, and to provide senior leaders with the right balance of support and challenge.
- Discussions with governors confirmed that they know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. Regular reports from the executive principal and periodic reports from external consultants provide them with the information they need to evaluate the school's effectiveness accurately, and manage the performance of staff.
- The board manages finances effectively. They check that additional funding to enable Year 7 pupils to catch up in their literacy and numeracy skills is well spent, and that pupil premium funding is used appropriately to raise achievement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All checks are carried out when new staff are recruited to work with children. Governors check that the single central record is kept up to date.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place so that staff and parents understand what to do if they have concerns about a pupil's welfare.
- A team of designated staff manage and oversee all aspects of child protection. An experienced and effective team leader ensures that all records of incidents and concerns are meticulously maintained and are followed up robustly. She knows pupils, and their parents, well. Staff maintain contact with them, and make home visits to ensure that pupils are safe.
- There are strong partnerships with other local agencies responsible for protecting children.
- Staff training, including training on the 'Prevent' duty to spot the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, is up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Previous monitoring visits and this inspection confirm that teaching, learning and assessment have improved significantly over the past year. However, further improvements are needed because teaching remains too inconsistent.

- Staff who have joined recently have brought with them new ideas and vitality. Some are unqualified or are new to teaching; others are recently appointed. Senior leaders acknowledge that more time is needed for these staff to become fully established before they can contribute fully to the school's improvement.
- Determined and resolute leadership has tackled weak teaching head-on. The executive principal's expectations of teaching are made clear to all staff. Those unable to meet them are given clear plans and timelines to improve. Changes have led to some instability as staff have left or joined the school. A significant proportion of new staff have not had time to establish themselves fully, and master the school's teaching policy and procedures.
- Relations between staff and pupils are usually good. Inspectors found that when needed, procedures to manage behaviour are generally applied consistently. Pupils understand the consequences of poor behaviour. Despite this, some low-level disruption interferes with the learning of others. Leaders' monitoring records show that last year, and since the start of this term, a small minority of pupils are regularly removed from lessons.
- Not all teachers provide the most able pupils with enough challenge in lessons to enable them to achieve their full potential. For example, in mathematics some of the most able pupils feel that they are held back because work is pitched at C grade, rather than at A* and A grade.
- Inspectors noted basic spelling and grammatical errors in pupils' work throughout both key stages, and particularly among boys. Teachers highlight these errors, but the procedures to correct them are not applied consistently. Some pupils continue to misspell basic words. Some do not use capital letters, commas and full stops in their writing. These are fundamental errors that are not being corrected systematically.
- Not all staff follow the school's agreed procedures to 'circulate, check and react' during lessons. Consequently, a minority of pupils do not work hard enough, do a minimal amount of work compared to others, and at times do not complete their work.
- Inspectors noted some good-quality, extended writing in a range of subjects, illustrating teachers' good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils. However, a legacy of underachievement in the past means that a significant minority of pupils in both key stages, particularly boys, have poor handwriting skills. This includes some boys who are known to be in the most able group. Their written work and diagrams are often poorly presented. There is no consistent strategy to improve the presentation of pupils' work.
- At the start of lessons, most teachers share what they expect pupils to learn. They capture pupils' attention, for example with 'do this now' tasks, and use 'check-out' tasks to develop pupils' deeper learning. Teachers' questioning encourages pupils to engage readily in discussions and contribute their own ideas.
- The appointment of new, permanent teachers has reduced the number of supply staff. Pupils commented favourably on this, and the shorter, 60-minute lessons which help to maintain their interest. They told inspectors that some teachers provide them with good advice about how to improve their work, but they want the same good-quality advice in all subjects to help them meet their target grades.

- Assessment procedures in Year 11 and to a lesser extent in Year 10 are thorough and effective. They are under-developed in key stage 3. New procedures have been introduced this year to provide a clearer picture of how well all pupils are achieving. The first assessments are planned for later this term.

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 wear their uniforms with pride. Most of them are polite, respectful and act as good ambassadors.
- Pupils value the tutorials at the start of each day to help them organise themselves, develop their reading and increase their understanding of philosophical and ethical issues.
- All of the pupils spoken to during the inspection said they feel quite safe. They commented positively on how staff highlight potential dangers such as those involved in using social media, and teach them how to minimise the risks to their safety.
- Effective procedures are in place to protect and ensure the welfare of a small minority of older pupils who are taught off-site in alternative provision.
- Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying, and what to do if they encounter it. They receive regular updates in assemblies about how incidents are dealt with when they happen. Pupils were confident that if they reported any form of bullying it would be dealt with effectively.
- The restorative work carried out in the support centre on the causes and underlying reasons for bullying is highly effective. It helps pupils to reflect on their own actions and modify their behaviours.
- Pupils benefit from excellent social and cultural experiences that help them to develop a greater confidence and cultural awareness, as well as preparing them for life beyond school. For example, one parent enthused about the positive impact that the London Extravaganza trip had had on her child, who had previously suffered from anxiety, remarking that participating in it had been 'life-changing'.
- Pupils receive good guidance and advice about future careers. This begins in Year 7 and is maintained year on year up to Year 11. A range of careers fairs, off-site visits, work placements and visiting speakers from local industry help pupils make decisions when selecting GCSE courses at the end of Year 9. Pupils gain a thorough understanding about further education and training opportunities, and the world of work.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Leaders enforce a strict, zero-tolerance approach to disruptive behaviour in classrooms. Detentions and sending pupils to the removal room are used to deal with persistent, low-level disruption. Records show that the proportions of pupils removed from lessons, or placed in detention, are too high. While the number of cases is falling, the high frequency of both detentions and the use of the removal room indicates that the behaviour and self-discipline of a small but significant minority of pupils is not as good as it should be.

- Pupils' conduct around the school is generally positive; the vast majority of them gather in friendship groups or play football at breaks and lunchtimes. The school is a calm and safe place.
- The behaviour observed in lessons during the inspection was mainly positive. In cases where pupils misbehaved, it was clear that teachers had not fully applied the school's behaviour policy and procedures effectively.
- When the trust took over the running of the school, a significant minority of pupils had a history of sustained, persistent absence. This has been tackled systematically, and attendance is rising. This is due to the sustained efforts of pastoral staff who strive to convince pupils and their parents of the importance of regular attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Require improvement

- Significant gains were made in raising the achievement of Year 11 pupils in 2016. Intensive, targeted interventions to fill shortfalls in pupils' knowledge and understanding accelerated their learning and progress. Performance information shows that these pupils made similar progress to all pupils nationally, illustrating the impact of the sustained efforts of staff to help these pupils catch up.
- Notable success in this year's GCSE examinations is due to the actions of leaders to find out about the needs and abilities of each pupil in Year 11, assess the gaps in their learning, and fill them. Almost half of Year 11 pupils attained at least a C grade in English and mathematics. A larger proportion also attained a range of other GCSE and vocational qualifications compared to the previous year. Almost all pupils went on to local sixth forms, colleges or training settings. Based on their very low starting points when the trust took over, this represents remarkable improvement.
- No stone was left unturned to ensure that Year 11 pupils achieved the expectations of them. They were given access to their own study support area each morning, at the end of the school day and at weekends. Residential 'Boot camp' helped them to study and revise together, and boost their confidence. Intensive support and routine monitoring of their progress ensured that they were much better prepared for their examinations.
- Focusing on each individual pupil ensured that disadvantaged pupils also quickly caught up and went on to achieve well. A larger proportion of disadvantaged pupils attained basic awards in English and mathematics this year, and achieved better than other pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- There were very few most-able disadvantaged pupils. All these pupils attained at least five C grades including English and mathematics.
- Overall results differed widely between subjects. For example, the percentage of pupils attaining at least a C grade in GCSE English rose significantly, and almost all pupils achieved a national qualification in computing. However, results in science and a few foundation subjects remained stubbornly low.
- A small minority of Year 11 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities also caught up well and achieved the expectations of them. They benefited from the same approach to identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding, and provide additional support to help fill the gaps.

- Five Year 11 pupils were educated off-site in alternative provision. All of them attended regularly, achieved grades in line with their personal targets and progressed into further education, training or employment.
- Senior leaders forecast that improvement will be built on further this year. The current group of Year 11 pupils are making good progress and are on track to achieve even better GCSE results in 2017.
- Pupils in key stage 3 were not targeted with the same intensive support and routine monitoring, and did not make similar gains in their overall achievement. Assessment information in Years 7 to 9 has been unreliable in the past. A programme of regular testing and scrutiny of pupils' work has been introduced to rectify this.
- Observations of pupils at work in lessons, some carried out jointly with senior leaders, confirmed that currently most pupils in both key stages make steady rather than good progress, due to the variable quality of teaching.
- A few pupils read aloud to inspectors. Most-able pupils did so with fluency, accuracy and confidence. Lower-ability readers in Year 8 demonstrated that the additional support they received to help them catch up with their reading and literacy skills in Year 7 had made a difference. They all read with some fluency and knew what to do to decode words they found challenging.
- Discussions with older pupils confirmed that the profile of reading, particularly reading for pleasure, remains low.

School details

Unique reference number	136453
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10020483

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	709
Appropriate authority	The Paradigm Trust
Chair	David Willis
Executive principal	Amanda Phillips
Telephone number	01473 550 040
Website	http://ipswichacademy.paradigmtrust.org
Email address	amanda.phillips@paradigmtrust.org
Date of previous inspection	8–9 January 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with DfE guidance on what academies should publish.
- Paradigm Trust took over the school in September 2015, when it was already in special measures.
- The majority of pupils are White British. A small minority are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement or an education, health and care plan, is below average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average.
- The school met the government's floor targets (the minimum targets that schools are expected to achieve) in 2016.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was the fifth monitoring inspection since the school was placed in special measures in January 2015. On the first day of inspection, inspectors decided the school no longer requires special measures and converted it to a section 5 inspection.
- Inspectors visited 10 lessons, and carried out a learning walk of the school with a senior leader.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, three members of the trust board, two groups of pupils and a group of newly qualified and recently appointed staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures, self-evaluation and improvement planning, minutes of board meetings, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, monitoring of teaching records, and other information provided by senior leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in lessons.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Randall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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