

The Robert Napier School

Third Avenue, Gillingham, Kent ME7 2LX

Inspection dates

30–31 January 2019

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

- The headteacher's determination and passion have been pivotal in improving the school. Governors and staff are committed to the school's continued improvement.
- Together with his dedicated senior and middle leaders, the headteacher has successfully transformed the culture of the school. Behaviour is now good. Pupils and staff appreciate the friendly atmosphere. Pupils say that staff are helpful and supportive.
- Leaders' and teachers' hard work has ensured that the quality of teaching is now good. Teaching typically supports pupils' development of subject-specific knowledge and skills.
- Effective support for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is ensuring that their progress is improving towards that of other pupils nationally.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. Together, the local governing body and the chief executive officer of the Fort Pitt Thomas Aveling Academies Trust provide effective support and challenge to school leaders.
- The sixth form has improved. It is now good, because of better leadership and teaching. Students make especially good progress in vocational subjects.
- Pupils' attendance has improved substantially. Most pupils now attend school regularly. Leaders provide effective support to help those pupils whose persistent absence remains a concern.
- Pupils' progress across a broad range of subjects has risen to match that of pupils nationally.
- Pupils' progress in English and mathematics is lower than in other subjects, but is improving for current pupils.
- The well-designed curriculum prioritises the development of pupils' literacy skills. Leaders are making good use of the curriculum to raise pupils' aspirations for the future and to prepare them well for life in the community.
- Leaders have identified their next steps for further improvement. These include raising levels of challenge to ensure that pupils deepen their thinking, and that pupils' writing across the curriculum is consistently strong, especially for boys.
- Exceptionally high levels of pupils either join or leave the school throughout the year. The school's highly inclusive ethos ensures that these and all other pupils are safe and exceptionally well cared for. Consequently, pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils make even better progress, by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - promote pupils', and especially boys', application of their literacy and communication skills across the curriculum
 - raise levels of challenge by planning learning which promotes deeper thinking, particularly for middle- and high-ability pupils
 - embed strategies to increase the progress made by disadvantaged pupils, including, in particular, the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- Continue to improve attendance by reducing persistent absence still further.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher's determination to achieve the very best for pupils at The Robert Napier School has underpinned the improvements to all aspects of the school. He has created a community ethos where the morale of both staff and pupils is positive. The outstanding personal development and welfare that the headteacher and his team offer at Robert Napier are highly valued by pupils. As one pupil said: 'All teachers care about us, especially Mr Minchin. I am really proud to be at this school.'
- Since the previous inspection, the leadership team has been streamlined and strengthened. Senior and middle leaders are a unified group with a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their strong focus on raising standards through improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is at the heart of the school's successful development. Middle leaders feel well guided and valued. Most are typically effective in monitoring and supporting the work of their teams.
- Leaders use what they find from lesson visits, monitoring of assessments, and scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning to identify areas for further improvement in teaching. For example, leaders recognise that teachers' planning does not always focus carefully enough on meeting the needs of different groups of pupils. In particular, pupils do not apply their developing literacy skills strongly enough, and are not encouraged to think sufficiently deeply in all year groups and across the whole curriculum.
- Staff appreciate the targeted professional training, which helps them to improve their skills in a supportive environment. Shared professional-development opportunities, targeted subject-specific support and moderation of pupils' work with schools from across the trust contribute strongly to raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The curriculum is carefully tailored to meet pupils' different needs. Pupils follow a suitably broad and balanced curriculum. Prominence is rightly given throughout the school to ensuring that pupils know more and remember more. Securing pupils' literacy skills by improving their vocabulary is also an appropriate current focus. The school has ensured that arts subjects and vocational subjects maintain an important place within the curriculum. Currently, few pupils choose to study a language at key stage 4, although leaders have amended their planning to ensure a higher uptake of languages for future cohorts.
- A small proportion of pupils follow an alternative curriculum which focuses on improving pupils' literacy skills and developing their emotional well-being and/or behaviour. Pupils value these courses for contributing greatly to their ability to access the main curriculum successfully.
- Leaders make sure that the Year 7 catch-up funding is used to good effect to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils who arrive at school with below-average attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Targeted extra help ensures that several are able to transfer quickly to mainstream lessons.

- Since the last inspection, leaders have greatly improved the use of pupil premium funding. It is now used very well to help remove disadvantaged pupils' barriers to learning. Leaders carefully measure the impact of funding on pupils' progress, refining its use over time so that it meets pupils' different needs very well. As a result, current pupils are making better progress than previous pupils. However, disadvantaged pupils' progress remains a priority. Strategies to improve the use of funding to raise the attainment of the small proportion of most-able disadvantaged pupils are still in development.
- Leaders make sure that support for pupils with SEND is finely tuned and matched well to pupils' needs, including for those pupils who attend the specialist resource provision because of a visual impairment. This is having a positive impact. For example, at key stage 3, pupils with SEND are making better progress than their peers.
- There are exceptionally high levels of pupils joining or leaving the school part way through the year or key stage. The school's highly inclusive approach and outstanding quality of care mean that pupils who join are welcomed and, typically, settle quickly. Leaders make sure that pupils who leave the school do so for the right reasons. For example, some go on to specialist provisions to support their special educational or behaviour needs. Leaders ensure that pupils who leave the school are safe and engaged in learning. For example, leaders provide initial work for pupils whose parents have chosen to educate their children at home. Leaders are also diligent in reporting to the local authority any pupils who might be missing from education.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Citizenship education and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education play an important part in the school's curriculum. In particular, pupils demonstrate a good understanding of democracy; for example, they discussed knowledgeably the recent 'no confidence' vote in parliament. Students in the sixth form appreciated the sessions on how to manage their money.
- Extra-curricular activities are popular with pupils. They enjoy participating in several sporting clubs, and look forward to trips to local places of interest, such as Dover castle and central London. Pupils are also given the opportunity to broaden their horizons through visits to Europe and America. The early morning basketball academy is very popular with pupils, especially those whose behaviour and attendance have been weaker in the past. Through such activities, pupils develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding effectively.
- The vast majority of parents and carers are happy with the school and note the improvements made over time. Several parents commented that staff are friendly and helpful, and that they listen when parents have concerns. As one said: 'All the teachers and particularly the head teacher have made us feel welcome and immediately reassured us with any concerns we have had.' Another said: 'They act promptly to support all pupils. I often recommend the school to other parents as my son is doing so well here.'

Governance of the school

- Governance, provided by the local governing body and the trust, makes a strong contribution to the overall leadership of the school. Since the last inspection, the local governing body has reorganised its work so that it is now much more effective. Governors are well trained. They possess a broad range of skills, which they use to

support and challenge school leaders effectively. They check the impact of leaders' work through useful visits to the school.

- Governors are determined to improve pupils' life chances. They have been particularly effective at challenging leaders to improve attendance and behaviour, and in strengthening the curriculum to meet more closely the needs of vulnerable pupils.
- Collectively, the headteachers of the trust's schools monitor each other's work. Together with the chief executive officer of the trust, they provide effective support and challenge to school leaders, particularly in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.
- Governors assure themselves that safeguarding and other statutory requirements are met, for example by ensuring that child protection policies and practice promote an understanding of the social context of the local community.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors make sure that staff are very well trained in safeguarding and child protection. Staff know the pupils very well and are quick to report any concerns they may have about pupils' welfare or safety. These concerns are acted on promptly, including by liaising with families and through referrals to outside agencies when pupils need additional help.
- The school's PSHE education programme includes regular reminders about how to manage risk safely. Leaders make sure that pupils are educated about such issues as how to stay safe from gangs and the dangers of drugs. Pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of how to stay safe online, including knowing not to trust everything they see on social media, and the dangers of radicalisation.
- Pupils feel exceptionally well cared for and safe in the school. All could identify an adult they would go to if they needed help or advice. They are confident that they are listened to when they do have concerns. Most parents agree.
- Leaders and governors follow safer recruitment procedures appropriately. The school's single central record of staff is well maintained.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Ongoing improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have helped to improve the achievement of pupils in the school. In particular, teachers use assessment well to identify accurately what pupils cannot yet do, and plan learning to address any gaps. Pupils say they appreciate the feedback teachers provide, in line with the school's policies, as it helps them to make improvements to their work and to make better progress.
- Positive relationships between staff and pupils, as well as clear and consistent routines, mean that classrooms are typically orderly and purposeful. Pupils show respect for their teachers and for each other. They are willing to learn, and listen well. Teachers' ongoing hard work to build pupils' resilience and confidence is starting to show results, with pupils increasingly confident to share their views and to participate in activities.

- Teaching is typically well organised. Teachers plan activities which pupils find interesting and engaging. Teachers ask insightful questions which probe pupils' understanding well. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to provide appropriate advice for pupils to move their learning on. Teaching in history is particularly strong. Increased consistency means that the quality of teaching has improved especially well in mathematics and science.
- A high proportion of pupils join the school with lower-than-average literacy skills. Teachers rightly prioritise expanding pupils' vocabulary, and developing pupils' oracy skills through encouraging discussion. All pupils are encouraged to read regularly, which helps to improve their skills still further. Individual support programmes help those pupils with particularly low literacy skills to make strong progress. Overall, the structured, systematic approach to literacy development leads to strong progress in pupils' literacy development. This is particularly helping disadvantaged pupils to make better progress than in the past.
- Support for pupils with SEND is effective, including for visually impaired pupils who attend the specialist resource provision. Typically, adults know the approaches which work best with individual pupils, and tailor support to meet their different needs well. On occasion, the inconsistent application of teaching strategies known to help individual pupils leads to less secure progress for some pupils.
- Pupils appreciate the consistent approach to homework. The work set for pupils helps to develop their knowledge of the topics they are studying, providing additional information which pupils can use in lessons.
- The most effective teaching takes into account pupils' different starting points and uses a range of strategies to stretch pupils' learning well. However, leaders recognise that, sometimes, teachers' planning is not sufficiently focused on raising levels of challenge still further, particularly for middle- and high-ability pupils. Expectations of pupils' writing are also not consistently high enough.
- There are some pockets of weaker teaching, for example when expectations of pupils' behaviour are not high enough or where work is not sufficiently interesting or challenging. This leads on occasion to some pupils becoming distracted and disrupting learning. Leaders are addressing weaker teaching through well-planned additional support and training.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The headteacher and his staff have created an exceptionally caring and inclusive environment. Adults know pupils very well and pupils know that they will be taken seriously if they have any concerns. Consequently, pupils feel extremely safe and well supported in school. As one pupil said: 'Staff look after us like we are their own.'
- Pupils' welfare has top priority. There are highly effective, strong and substantial systems in place to offer guidance and support, including using outside agencies where appropriate. Pupils value greatly the help they receive. Several pupils told inspectors

that the school has helped them to self-regulate their behaviour and to raise their self-esteem.

- Pupils show a well-developed understanding of the importance of equalities. They understand that everyone is different, and were especially keen to explain that they find homophobia unacceptable. Tolerance and diversity are promoted well in the school, and leaders are quick to react should any issues arise. This has created a community where, as one pupil said: 'People are happy to be themselves.'
- Leaders place a high priority on the importance of healthy lifestyles to help maintain good mental health. Leaders promote the importance of sleep, eating healthily, regular exercise and minimising stress. Pupils embrace these ideas, for example through helping to improve the quality of food served at lunchtime, and through participating in a wide range of sporting activities and drama productions.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils say that this is a friendly school. They typically conduct themselves in a calm, orderly way as they move around the school. The dinner hall provides a relaxed, sociable environment for pupils to meet during break and lunchtimes.
- Pupils say the school is a much calmer place than in the past. In classrooms, pupils are typically quiet, respectful and focused on learning. They listen to each other, and respond to each other's views positively. Occasionally there is some low-level off-task behaviour. For example, when teaching does not hold pupils' interest, or when the behaviour policy is not used consistently, some pupils lose focus.
- Attendance is much improved and is now in line with the national average. This is because of leaders' highly effective work to promote the importance of good attendance and to help those pupils who struggle to come to school more regularly. Far fewer pupils than in the past are persistently absent, although leaders rightly wish to do more to work with families to reduce this still further.
- A few parents raised concerns about bullying. Incidents of bullying have reduced over time. This is because of the school's highly effective work to establish a community ethos in the school. Pupils say that, on the rare occasion bullying does happen, adults will swiftly help to sort it out.
- Levels of exclusion, including permanent exclusion, have decreased substantially over time. This is due to the overall improvement in pupils' behaviour. Extensive support is put in place for pupils who need additional help to maintain control of their behaviour. Pupils told inspectors that programmes like the anger-management course help them to recognise the signs that they are getting angry, and give them techniques which they use to calm themselves down. Governors make sure that, when leaders do use exclusion, it is as a last resort.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make similar progress by the end of key stage 4 to pupils nationally, across a broad range of subjects. Current pupils are making even better progress than previous pupils because of better teaching and an improved culture of learning in the school.

Pupils make their strongest progress where teaching is strongest, for example in history, physical education and drama.

- The school rightly celebrates pupils' achievements in the broader curriculum. For example, several pupils have achieved success through becoming proficient in playing a musical instrument. In Year 9, a large group of pupils are successfully completing the bronze level Duke of Edinburgh's Award.
- In the past, progress in some individual subjects has been weaker than it should be, including in English, mathematics and science. Leaders have acted on this, improving the quality of teaching and of leadership. As a result, current pupils' progress in these subjects is improving strongly towards that expected.
- Current pupils with SEND, including those who attend the specialist resource provision, make typically good progress from their different starting points. This is because of the high-quality bespoke support they receive, which allows them to access the curriculum. In particular, pupils with SEND in Years 7 and 8 make better progress than their peers. Where progress of pupils with SEND is less secure, this is often due to the inconsistent application of teaching strategies known to help individual pupils.
- The overall progress of disadvantaged pupils is weaker than that of other pupils. Many of these pupils join the school with very low levels of literacy. Extensive high-quality provision to improve pupils' literacy is making a positive difference. School information and pupils' work indicate that, although there are still some gaps in the learning of older pupils, outcomes are improving for this group throughout the school. Leaders, rightly, continue to prioritise disadvantaged pupils' progress, including that of the most able disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders recognise that girls' progress is consistently stronger than that of boys. They have researched the reasons for this, and have made some amendments to the curriculum to support boys in making improved progress over time. This is starting to have a positive impact in some subjects.
- Over time, strong support for low-ability pupils means that this group make good progress. Middle- and high-ability pupils have not always made the progress that they are capable of, especially in English and mathematics. This is because the work teachers set has not always been challenging enough. Teachers' improved assessment and planning are beginning to make a positive difference, as teachers now consider pupils' different starting points in their planning. Pupils receive useful careers information, advice and guidance to help them make informed decisions about their futures. Pupils appreciate the impartial careers advice, careers fayres, interview practice and help with writing applications to college and university. Over time, the proportion of pupils gaining access to further education, employment or training has increased, although it is slightly below national figures.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of the sixth form is effective. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the provision. Over time, students' progress in vocational subjects is broadly average, although it dipped last year. Students' progress has been below average for academic subjects. Leaders have quickly made changes to the provision, which is resulting in more consistently good teaching for both

academic and vocational subjects. Consequently, the progress of current students is much improved.

- Leaders have similarly strong expectations for the quality of teaching and assessment in the sixth form as they do in the rest of the school. Regular, high-quality assessment is helping teachers to know how well they are progressing, and to intervene swiftly where necessary. Students know clearly where any improvements are needed and are given strong support in refining their work. Teachers' good subject knowledge and good-quality questioning is encouraging students to think more deeply and in more complex ways. All this is ensuring that standards are rising.
- Students enter the sixth form with broadly average attainment. Leaders consider local Medway employment opportunities when choosing the subjects they offer as part of the sixth-form curriculum. Leaders' careful advice ensures that students choose to study courses which are well matched to their starting points and aspirations. As a result, retention on courses is high, and much improved since the last inspection.
- Students have the opportunity to develop work-related skills, for example through taking up work experience and through taking on leadership roles in school. For example, several students run sporting activities for local primary schools. Leaders make sure that they raise students' aspirations through arranging visits to university and offering good-quality careers advice. Over time, the proportion of students who secure further education, training or employment is improving. Recently, increasing proportions are gaining access to Russell Group universities.
- A few students who have not yet achieved English and mathematics at grade C or above at GCSE are admitted into the sixth form. These pupils are given good support to achieve these qualifications before moving on to academic or vocational courses at the school.
- Last year, several pupils who received unconditional offers for further study did not make the progress they should have. Leaders have responded swiftly to this with enhanced careers advice and mentoring. For example, leaders highlight that future employers will consider students' academic achievements at this level as well as their further education qualifications. In addition, closer monitoring of students' progress is allowing leaders to spot any students whose progress slows and to intervene more quickly.
- Students experience a range of enrichment activities, which contribute well to their personal development and welfare. For example, students listened to visiting motivational speakers who helped them to raise their aspirations and focus their minds on study. Students were helped to prepare for future voting in political elections while attending 'question time' with local MPs. Students told inspectors that they take their position as role models to the rest of the school very seriously. Several mentor younger pupils in developing music, sporting and academic skills. Students are taught how to keep themselves safe. For example they study programmes on road safety awareness, sexual health and the dangers of radicalisation. Students' behaviour is excellent and their attendance good.

School details

Unique reference number	138511
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10053305

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

Type of school	Secondary Modern (non-selective)
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	994
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	96
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair	Terry Brown
Headteacher	Andrew Minchin
Telephone number	01634 851 157
Website	http://www.robertnapier.org.uk/
Email address	trns@robertnapier.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 September 2016

Information about this school

- The school is a larger-than-average-sized secondary school. It serves a non-selective intake in an area where nearly a third of pupils attend selective grammar schools.
- The school is part of the Fort Pitt Thomas Aveling Academies Trust. It has its own local governing body, which holds the school to account. The overall accountable body is the board of trustees. The trust employs a chief executive officer to oversee the work of the school.
- Prior attainment of pupils on entry to the school is well below the national average.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

- Nearly half of the school's intake are disadvantaged and eligible for the pupil premium funding. This proportion is well above average.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The school has exceptionally high levels of pupil mobility.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is nearly double the national average.
- A below-average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. A below-average proportion speak English as an additional language.
- The school does not use any alternative off-site provision.
- The school has specially resourced provision for visually impaired pupils. There are currently nine pupils in this provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 45 lessons. In addition, short visits were made to the referral room and to tutor periods. Several lessons were visited jointly with leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and staff, including senior and middle leaders, and teachers and support staff. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust. Inspectors took account of 100 responses to Ofsted’s staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors took account of the 41 responses from parents to Ofsted’s online questionnaire Parent View, as well as 17 free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered pupils’ views by holding some informal discussions with pupils during lessons and at breaktimes. Five formal meetings were also held with pupils to collect their views.
- Together with senior leaders, inspectors examined a selection of pupils’ work from key stages 3 and 4. Together with students, an inspector examined students’ work in the sixth form.
- A wide range of school documentation was scrutinised. This included leaders’ self-evaluation documents, improvement plans, information about pupils’ progress, the school’s website, records of attendance, documentation relating to the work of governance, and a range of policies and information, including those relating to safeguarding. Inspectors also reviewed the checks the school makes to ensure that adults who work in the school are recruited safely.
- A telephone conversation was held with the leader of a local pupil referral unit.
- A letter from the local authority attendance advisory practitioner was also considered.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Claire Prince	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Colin Lankester	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Murphy	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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