

Inspection of The Robert Napier School

Third Avenue, Gillingham, Kent ME7 2LX

Inspection dates:	24 and 25 September 2024
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Sixth-form provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Jenny Tomkins. This school is part of the Beyond Schools Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Andrew Minchin, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Veen Rama.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils appreciate the changes that have taken place in their school recently. They are benefiting from the renewed focus on high aspiration and ambition. They feel happy and safe, with strong pastoral support in place. The school is actively working to improve pupils' behaviour. However, there are moments when a lack of pupil engagement and low-level disruptions hinder learning.

The school has made significant strides in promoting good behaviour. However, routines and expectations are not fully established. Classrooms are calmer, and behaviour has improved, but high rates of suspensions and exclusions remain. This reflects the fact that a small minority of pupils are not yet acting in line with school expectations.

The school offers a detailed personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme. The programme addresses key topics such as equality, democracy and the rule of law. However, this has not been fully embedded across the year groups. Pupils feel well supported in areas such as online safety and mental health, which they value highly. They also appreciate the variety of extra-curricular and sporting activities available to them.

Disadvantaged pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), welcome the support they receive for their personal development. However, attendance remains low, particularly among these groups. The school is working hard to address poor attendance and acknowledges that this limits pupils' ability to fully benefit from the school's curriculum.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The quality of education at the school varies across subjects. While the curriculum is generally well planned in most subjects, there are still gaps that require improvement. In most subjects, the content is thoughtfully designed and adapted to meet pupils' specific needs. For example, in mathematics, the curriculum is carefully structured with a consistent approach across the department. This ensures that pupils experience a cohesive and organised learning environment. In English, the curriculum has undergone a complete redesign. However, development work is still in the preliminary stages and is not yet fully embedded.

In other subjects, the school has worked hard to create a broad and balanced curriculum. However, the effectiveness has been hindered by pupils' poor attendance, which has not allowed them sufficient time to develop their literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Consequently, pupils' academic achievement remains significantly below national averages and often ranks towards the lower end of schools across the country.

The school recognises the importance of developing pupils' literacy skills, especially in writing, speaking and reading. Although there is good support for the weakest readers, this provision is still relatively new. Consequently, the impact has yet to be fully realised.

across the school. The school is actively working to increase language uptake to ensure that access to the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is not limited.

Most teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge. Subject training for non-specialist teachers is helping to improve their expertise. The curriculum is focused on ensuring that knowledge is revisited to help pupils retain what they have learned. However, pupils' recall of prior and current knowledge is still developing.

There are a wide range of strategies to support disadvantaged pupils, including those with SEND. While these pupils are well known to staff, the quality of support in classrooms varies. As a result, the gap in performance between disadvantaged pupils and their peers remains significant. Progress towards closing this gap has been slow.

Relationships with parents and carers, and the wider community, are improving. The school emphasises fostering a sense of community among pupils. The PSHE curriculum is well-designed to cultivate tolerance and respect. However, significant aspects of the personal development provision are still being embedded. The school ensures that all pupils receive useful careers advice and guidance. This is beginning to encourage pupils to make better-informed decisions about their future. Beyond the classroom, pupils have access to a range of extra-curricular activities covering sports and clubs.

The school operates a small sixth form with a mix of academic, applied and technical courses. Despite the broad and balanced curriculum, students' performance in external examinations is not secure. Some students drop out before completing their courses. Attendance in the sixth form is also low, but with recent signs of improvement. Students benefit from tailored guidance to support their future decisions, especially regarding university applications.

The school has undergone a rapid turnover in leadership in recent years. Leaders have worked hard to develop a clear and ambitious vision for the school. The trust has provided extensive training for staff, but quality assurance visits need to be even more demanding. Governors are enthusiastic, but need to continue to challenge the school on key issues. Staff say that leaders are considerate of their workload and well-being. They take considerable pride in contributing to the school's ongoing improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are inconsistencies in how well the curriculum is implemented across different subjects. These inconsistencies mean that pupils do not learn and achieve as well as they could. The school needs to be more challenging in its support for staff, including

further ongoing professional development and focused intervention strategies, so that the curriculum is implemented consistently well and all pupils achieve as well as they could.

- The school needs to do more to ensure that pupils attend school regularly. Too many pupils do not benefit from the education that the school provides and are falling further behind in their education. The school should ensure that it continues to devise and persist with rigorous and effective strategies that secure sustained improvement in pupils' attendance.
- The gap in the performance of disadvantaged pupils, including outcomes, attendance and behaviour, is still too large. Consequently, these pupils do not make as much progress as their peers. Further development work is needed to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are better supported in the classroom, and that their attendance and behaviour improves, so that they achieve as well as they could.
- Retention, attendance and outcomes in the sixth form are not high enough. As a result, students do not benefit as they should in the school's sixth form. Leaders need to build on the work already in place to ensure that students are enrolled on the appropriate courses, that outcomes continue to improve, and student attendance is highlighted and prioritised so that they attend and achieve well.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138511
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10321959
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 sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1035
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	104
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trustees	Veen Rama
CEO of the trust	Andrew Minchin
Headteacher	Jenny Tomkins
Website	www.robertnapier.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	30 and 31 January 2019

Information about this school

- The Robert Napier School is an average-sized 11 to 18 mixed school with a much smaller than average-sized sixth form. The school is part of the Beyond Schools trust.
- The school is situated in an area with selective education.
- Twelve pupils attend alternative provision at six registered education providers.
- The school has a specially resourced provision for 10 pupils with visual impairment.
- Since the last inspection, there have been considerable changes to the school leadership team, including the appointment of a new headteacher from July 2023.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history, art and the social sciences. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders and visited a sample of lessons. They talked to teachers, spoke with pupils and looked at samples of their work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record and took account of the views of leaders, staff, pupils and parents. They considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding which puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed the policies provided on the school website. They looked at attendance records, behaviour logs, curriculum documentation and destination statistics. Inspectors held meetings with leaders, teachers and pupils. The lead inspector met representatives of the trust and the local governing body.
- Inspectors looked at the responses to the Ofsted Parent View online questionnaire and additional written comments received from parents and carers. They considered the survey returns completed by staff and pupils. The lead inspector also spoke to a parent who requested a telephone conversation.

Inspection team

Paul Metcalf, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Andy Rees	Ofsted Inspector
Scott Norman	Ofsted Inspector
Ann Fearon	Ofsted Inspector

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