

# Alcester Academy

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	137172
<b>Local authority</b>	N/A
<b>Inspection number</b>	385578
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 January 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Michael Smith HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	757
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mike Dean
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jane Brooks
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	24 September 2008
<b>School address</b>	Gerard Road Alcester B49 6QQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01789 762285
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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Michael Smith	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Sutton	Additional inspector
Robert Smith	Additional inspector
Janet Bird	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 37 lessons taught by 34 teachers. The majority of these visits were accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team. They held meetings with staff, students, and members of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the academy's work, and looked at 116 parent and carer questionnaires, 25 staff questionnaires and 112 student questionnaires, assessment records, the minutes of the meetings of the governing body, faculty evaluations and the academy's action plans and evaluations.

## Information about the school

Alcester Academy is a smaller-than-average non-selective school which serves the communities of Alcester and Bidford-on-Avon, including the surrounding villages. There are a number of selective schools within easy travelling distance. It converted to an academy in August 2011 from Alcester High School Technology College. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average as is the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds or those who are learning English as an additional language. The academy meets the government's current floor standards.

The headteacher was appointed from April 2009. The academy has recently been awarded the Eco Green Flag gold award and the Investors in Careers kite mark.

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

### Key findings

- This is a satisfactory academy which has made significant improvements over the last three years from its predecessor school.
- The headteacher’s effective leadership and strong support from leaders across all levels have been influential in overcoming weaknesses in achievement and teaching so that they are both satisfactory and improving quickly.
- Students say they feel safe. Behaviour is good around school but at times in lessons some students, who behave well elsewhere, distract others. This is often when lessons fail to motivate and engage.
- Responses from parent and carer questionnaires indicated that the majority believe that behaviour is good, although at times lessons are disrupted by the inappropriate behaviour.
- In the majority of lessons, teaching is good or better. However, there remain a significant proportion of lessons where learning is only satisfactory.
- In the best lessons, opportunities for students to work in groups or individually, generate enthusiasm and a desire to learn. This ensures good pace and challenge, especially for the high attainers. Teachers use questions well to ensure students acquire knowledge and understanding.
- Lessons often include opportunities for students to develop a good spiritual awareness, a moral understanding of relevant issues, awareness of a variety of different cultures and the ability to work sociably and cooperatively.
- Lessons generally meet the needs of students well but when teaching is less successful lessons lack pace and challenge and there is a focus on subject knowledge without developing understanding.
- At times disabled students or those with special educational needs, or those with weak reading skills, are not given sufficient support to enable them to engage fully in their work. These students can read words but they do not always understand what the words mean.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to raise achievement by ensuring that:

- lessons are consistently delivered with good pace and challenge
  - disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, or low literacy and weak reading skills, have any barriers to their learning quickly identified and then ensure that effective support and strategies are introduced across all lessons.
- Improve further the quality of teaching and learning so that at least three quarters of lessons are consistently judged good or better by ensuring that:
- work is well matched to students' abilities and challenges the most able
  - lessons deepen students' understanding as well as ensure the coverage of subject knowledge
  - students remain focused on their tasks when working independently or in groups after the initial expositions by teachers.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

Achievement is satisfactory and improving year on year. Students enter the academy with broadly average attainment which has been increasing steadily over the last few years. They make satisfactory progress overall, with good progress in English and science. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has improved significantly over the last three years with students mainly taking GCSE subjects. Effective support for lower attaining students, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, has meant that the proportion of students who gain five or more GCSE passes is above average. In 2011 the school was successful in narrowing the gap between students known to be eligible for free school meals and students overall. They achieved better than this group did nationally.

During the inspection, the inspectors observed students making satisfactory and often good progress in lessons. Responses from the parents and carers show that most agree that their children made good progress at the academy. Learning was best when the lesson concentrated on improving students' understanding as well as ensuring they gained knowledge and skills. Questioning was often used well to enable students give reasons for their answers. This helped students develop better reasoning skills. However, at times, students were less engaged and quickly became restless after the teacher's initial input. In these lessons learning was only satisfactory.

In some lessons, students demonstrate good literacy skills and this supports the academy's improvement to achievement in English. However, in other lessons students who had difficulties with reading complex language were not always identified quickly enough or given sufficient support, particularly when they could read the words but did not comprehend their meaning. Disabled students and those with special educational needs usually make good progress in lessons where specific strategies to support them are identified. However, occasionally, the use of additional strategies and support are ineffective and do not enable students to make enough progress.

## Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching has improved over the last three years with many lessons incorporating interesting and engaging activities. When teaching is good or better, lessons get off to a purposeful start and students become involved in their work quickly. Staff make good use of electronic whiteboards to engage students, including the use of video clips. Well-focused questioning is used to extend students' learning, particularly when it develops students' understanding. Marking is good and supports students in knowing what they need to do to improve. Increasingly, they are responding to their teachers' advice and a learning dialogue ensues. Key aspects of literacy are identified and students have opportunities to develop their numeracy skills across a variety of subjects.

When teaching is satisfactory, lessons are less dynamic and focus upon subject knowledge with less consideration given to deepening student's skills and understanding. Teaching is usually matched to the needs of the middle-ability group within the class but this means that the higher-attaining students are often not sufficiently challenged. The impetus from the start of the lesson is not maintained and, when students get down to work by themselves or in groups, learning is not as focused and the pace slows. In these lessons marking does not always identify what needs to be improved and, at times, there is a considerable gap between occasions when books are marked.

Lessons often allow students to reflect upon spiritual elements, for example in science. Students gain an insight into different cultures, for example within art. They consider moral aspects, for example when considering the sustainable issues when using disposable nappies, and social understanding, particularly when students work well in groups.

## Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students say they feel safe within the academy and are aware of the dangers which are evident in society today. They are confident that the academy does all it can to help minimise these risks. The academy's support unit is successful in guiding students who are in need of additional help, including those who are suffering from stress and anxiety. Students are aware of different types of bullying. They say they have received good support to overcome instances of bullying through the use of mobile phones or the internet. When rare incidents occur, students say that staff respond well to support both victim and perpetrator. Views from parents and carers are mixed, with some saying that their children had received good support but with others being less appreciative of the way in which an incident had been handled by the academy.

Behaviour around academy is good with students being polite and courteous. However, behaviour in lessons is variable. While it is predominately good, when lessons are not sufficiently engaging some students lose interest and are not fully involved with their learning. Responses from parents, carers and students show that behaviour is variable, ranging from excellent in some classes to poor in a small minority of others.

## Leadership and management

The strong leadership provided by the headteacher has made a significant difference to the way in which the academy operates. The headteacher has the respect of staff and students and her ambition and drive are shared by all. Senior leaders work well and staff say they feel empowered and committed to carrying on the improvements already made.

The quality of teaching has improved significantly through combination of effective performance management, professional development and close monitoring by leaders at all levels. This has also raised achievement from inadequate in 2009 to satisfactory. This demonstrates the good capacity the academy has to carry on improving. The good curriculum is responsive to students' needs and prepares them well for their next steps. For example, students are able to progress to study science A level because they can complete a GCSE in each of the separate sciences. For others, the curriculum has been adapted so that they can study at the local college for two days a week. The curriculum supports students to develop good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. A working party is supporting departments in updating their schemes of work to identify and deliver more opportunities for students to incorporate these aspects in their learning. Leadership of the academy has worked well to narrow the gap between the achievement of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and hence promote equality and tackle discrimination. They have also been successful with a number of students whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable and by helping them to achieve success in a variety of GCSE examinations, albeit in a smaller number of subjects.

Governance is good and holds departments to account for their examination results. This close scrutiny, along with senior leaders' monitoring procedures, is pivotal in ensuring equality of opportunity for students. There is a similar attention from members of the governing body, along with all staff, to ensure all aspects of safeguarding meet current requirements and that the academy is as safe as possible.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



20 January 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Alcester Academy, Alcester, B49 6QQ**

When I visited your academy recently with my colleagues, we met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. Thank you very much for your help and cooperation. We were impressed with your courtesy and manners, and how well you get on with each other. These are some of the reasons why your academy has been able to improve and we judge it to be satisfactory. Well done!

Our observations showed that achievement is rising and is satisfactory at present. The academy makes sure that you follow a good curriculum which helps prepare you for your next phase of education or the world of work. The curriculum also ensures that you have opportunities to think about the spiritual elements of your studies, think about moral issues which are relevant today, work sociably together in groups and learn about a wide variety of cultures. We observed 37 lessons and saw that you enjoy some interesting lessons. We judged that teaching has improved and is satisfactory. However, we have asked the academy to improve the quality of lessons further so that you are always challenged fully, that the work is well matched to your abilities and that you carry on working at the same rate after the initial activity within lessons. You can help by making sure a small number of you do not make this as an excuse not to concentrate. We have also asked the academy to quickly identify any of you who are not as good at reading and give you good support across all lessons. We judged behaviour as satisfactory.

Staff care for you very well which is why a very large majority of you who filled in the student questionnaire said that you enjoy the academy and feel safe. Your headteacher and other senior leaders have identified what needs to be done and they are very determined to carry on improving the academy. They are supported by staff and members of the governing body.

We wish you well at this improving academy and hope you carry on helping it to get even better.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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