

Grace Academy Solihull

Inspection report

Unique reference number	129342
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	381251
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2012
Lead inspector	Gwendoline Coates HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1031
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Baker
Principal	Roy Baylis
Date of previous school inspection	26–27 November 2008
School address	Chapelhouse Lane Birmingham B37 5JS
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Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	18–19 January 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Gwendoline Coates

Her Majesty's Inspector

Michael Marks

Additional inspector

Simon Blackburn

Additional inspector

Kevin Harrison

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Approximately 20 hours were spent observing parts of 40 lessons, and an equivalent number of teachers were seen. This was in addition to the observation of a number of enrichment sessions, tutor periods and an assembly. Joint lesson observations with senior leaders and a scrutiny of students' work across a range of subjects took place. Meetings were held with individuals and groups of students of all ages, with the Chair of the Local Governing Body and with staff. 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 a range of documents including the academy's self-evaluation and improvement plan; the Principal's reports to the governing body and minutes of the governing body meetings; monitoring and tracking data; questionnaires completed by staff and students; and the 138 parental questionnaires that were returned.

Information about the school

The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is above the national average. Stability among students is above the national average.

The academy has experienced a turbulent period in relation to its senior leadership in recent years. The current senior leadership team has been in place since September 2010 and this is the first extended period of stability for the academy since its establishment. As a result, significant changes have taken place since the last inspection. As well as changes to the senior leadership team, these changes include: a complete turnover of staff in mathematics; changes to the governing body; changes to the curriculum; changes to policies in relation to behaviour, attendance and exclusion, the tracking and monitoring of performance and quality assurances processes.

The academy has not met the government's current floor standard.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- The academy is a satisfactory school.
- Achievement, although below the government’s floor standard, is rising steadily and currently students are making at least satisfactory progress in the core subjects, including in mathematics.
- Behaviour, which is a concern of many parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, is improving steadily. This is evident in the improving, although still below average attendance rate; the reducing, although still too high, exclusion rate; and evidence from lesson observations over time and during the inspection. Students say that they feel safe in the academy and responses to the parental questionnaire confirm this.
- Teaching is improving strongly. Few lessons are inadequate and many are good or better. There are examples of outstanding practice, where students make rapid progress in their learning and behave in an exemplary manner. However, there are still too many instances where, as a result of inconsistent application of the academy’s behaviour for learning policy and students’ themselves failing to take responsibility for their own behaviour, low level disruption by a few students impedes the progress of other students. Learning activities do not always match the needs of all students in the class and the quality of assessment to support learning is variable.
- The impact of strong leadership and management at all levels is having a marked impact on all aspects of the academy’s work. Senior leaders are clear about the strengths and weaknesses in the academy and firm in their resolve to bring about improvement. Middle leaders are fully empowered and accountable for their areas of responsibility, and are fully committed to raising students’ achievement.
- The sixth form is satisfactory. Leaders are fully aware that curriculum changes are needed in order to meet the needs of sixth form students more effectively and are actively planning the most suitable options.

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

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the achievement of all students at all key stages by:
 - ensuring that all teachers in all lessons apply the academy’s behaviour for learning policy consistently and rigorously so that disruption to learning is an unusual occurrence and in all lessons students take greater responsibility for their own learning
 - ensuring that teachers’ good lesson planning for learning activities to match the needs of all students and groups of students is translated into more effective implementation in lessons so that all students make good progress from their starting points
 - spreading the very good practice in teaching that is evident in the academy so that all teachers are aware of how outstanding teaching can lead to the highest standards of behaviour and outstanding learning in lessons
 - extending the best practice in assessment, such as that evident in English, and, in this context, ensuring that teachers’ helpful written comments are used effectively by students to improve the quality of their work
 - in relation to the sixth form, ensuring that suitable progression routes for all students are developed between the curriculum in Key Stage 4 and that in Key Stage 5, so that all students in the sixth form achieve at least in line with expectations.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Overall, attainment is low. However, the gap between the academy and national attainment benchmarks is closing as a result of a concerted effort to improve the rate at which every student makes progress from their starting points. Attainment in English has shown a continual trend of improvement over recent years. Historically, attainment in mathematics has been low but current attainment indicates significant improvement. In general, from their starting points, students in the sixth form achieve in line with expectations at A level but below expectation at AS level.

Inspection evidence and the academy’s own data over time indicate that progress is generally at least satisfactory. Students are now making at least expected progress and a good proportion are making better than expected progress. Disabled students and those with special educational needs made similar progress to all students in the lessons observed. They were well supported by teachers and by teaching assistants when these were deployed. Most parents and carers who responded to the

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questionnaire felt that their children were making good progress.

Well-focused interventions and support are ensuring that gaps in both attainment and the rate of progress being made between different groups of students within the academy and with national benchmarks, including for disabled students and those with special educational needs, students known to be eligible for free school meals, students from minority ethnic groups and for students who speak English as an additional language, are narrowing.

Students demonstrate improving skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. However, there are missed opportunities to exploit the development of basic skills across the curriculum. Most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire felt that the academy helped their children in developing these skills.

Quality of teaching

Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory and ensures that the progress students make is in line with expectations given their starting points. Inspectors' judgement about the quality of teaching seen during the inspection matches closely the judgements of the academy over time. In addition, most parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire felt their children were well taught in the academy.

Strengths identified in most lessons observed during the inspection include: well-planned lessons; a good variety of learning activities; good subject knowledge in teachers' specialist subject areas; and good relationships between teachers and students. The academy's behaviour for learning policy is not yet consistently implemented by all teachers and, as a result, lessons occasionally include low level disruption. While teaching strategies are usually well matched to class groupings, they are rarely fine-tuned to meet the needs of individuals or small groups of students within classes and thus these individuals often fail to make good progress in lessons. Simple questioning is used well to confirm basic understanding, although often this involves too few students. Higher level questioning that requires students to provide extended responses and enables them to develop their higher level oral skills is not a feature of the majority of lessons.

Students know their target grades and are regularly reminded of the assessment levels they must meet in order to attain these grades. Good oral feedback was given in some lessons, for example, in a mathematics lesson on finding angles, good use was made of student whiteboards, enabling the teacher to give instant and useful feedback to individuals and to the whole class. Inspectors saw evidence of very good marking in English. However, in general, the quality of assessment to support learning and the quality of marking is variable. In most subjects, even where written feedback is detailed, there is usually a failure to ensure that students act on the feedback to improve their work.

Although teaching overall is judged as satisfactory, teaching was good or better in over half of the lessons seen during the inspection and this concurs with the

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academy's own records. The best lessons observed contributed significantly to the development of aspects of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, with students demonstrating good cooperative skills, respect for each other and for their teachers, thoughtful behaviour and reflective responses.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Lesson observations during the inspection and the academy's lesson monitoring records over time suggest that behaviour is generally satisfactory and definitely improving. There are, however, incidents of low-level disruption in a few lessons and when this occurs it disrupts the learning of others in the class. Too many students fail to take responsibility for their own behaviour or behave well only in response to teacher prompts rather than their own self-management. In addition, there are inconsistencies in the extent to which all staff implement the academy's behaviour for learning policy. Although only a relatively small proportion of all parents and carers returned questionnaires, this view of behaviour was echoed by a sizeable minority of those who responded. It was also echoed by a sizeable minority of students and staff who responded to questionnaires and by those students who met with inspectors during the inspection.

Students are aware of all forms of bullying and know who to contact if it occurs. Most are confident that the academy will respond promptly once issues are brought to its attention. However, in a few cases, students, parents and carers noted that they lacked confidence in the academy's systems to deal with bullying. Senior leaders recognise that they need to improve existing strategies further in order to improve the confidence of all students, parents and carers in reporting instances of bullying.

Rates of non-attendance and of exclusions have been very high over recent years. However, these rates, as well as the number of behaviour incidents in lessons and the number of incidents of petty vandalism around the building, are all reducing as a result of rigorous and well-focused improvement strategies. There are some well documented examples, verified by meetings between students and inspectors, about how individual behaviour patterns have improved as a result of well-targeted interventions. These include examples of students who, in the past, were persistent non-attendees or who experienced repeated fixed-term exclusions as a result of behavioural issues. As a result of highly effective support and guidance from mentors and heads of colleges, these students now attend regularly and are responsible and well motivated young adults eager to achieve well.

Students say they feel safe in the academy and this was confirmed by those parents and carers who responded to the parental questionnaire.

Leadership and management

The current senior leadership team is bringing about significant improvement to the quality of the curriculum, the quality of teaching, behaviour and achievement. It has

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a clear vision, which is shared by all staff – to raise students' achievement by improving the quality of teaching and students' attitudes to learning.

Senior leaders have provided excellent support and developmental opportunities to ensure that middle leaders are accountable for their specialist areas of responsibility. In turn, middle leaders have taken on these responsibilities confidently and effectively. The strength of the leadership team, at both senior and middle leader level, is a key factor driving the improvement in the academy.

The capacity for improvement in the academy is strong because sustainable and robust systems are now embedded. These systems involve the monitoring and evaluation of student progress and of the performance of teachers and other staff. They include the provision of prompt and effective intervention and support to ensure all students have equal opportunity to achieve well, and professional development and support for underperforming teachers and other staff. Similar improvements to the monitoring and evaluation of performance and to the introduction of support and intervention have been introduced for students in the sixth form, although their implementation is not yet as robust.

Accurate self-evaluation indicates that the leaders know the academy's strengths and weaknesses, identify clearly the main areas for improvement and how to prioritise these and are taking action accordingly. Senior leaders are not complacent about their own judgements and ensure that the academy's internal quality assurance systems are supplemented by external moderation arrangements. Governance is satisfactory in supporting the academy and the governing body is now taking a more proactive and critical approach to its role in holding the academy to account. It ensures that safeguarding procedures are secure and that the academy meets all statutory requirements.

The academy is working hard to promote equality and tackle any discrimination that exists by ensuring that all students have access to an appropriate curriculum and the support needed to achieve their potential. One parent of a student with extensive individual needs said that the academy 'exceeded all expectations' in the support it provided. The curriculum is broad and balanced and offers pathways that reflect the range of ability and aptitudes of students in the academy. Partnerships with businesses and employers enhance the curriculum and the inclusion of well-judged vocational provision meets students' needs and interests. The curriculum in the sixth form still requires improvement. The academy is fully aware of this and is making changes to ensure bridging courses in Years 11 and 12 prepare students more fully for the academic demands made on them.

Many opportunities across the curriculum are provided to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including the compulsory weekly enrichment sessions that ensure each student experiences a community-related, creative and physical activity over the course of a year. It is further promoted via the vertical tutor group system, which has the capacity to promote harmony and a sense of community, and the academy's sanctions and reward system, about which many

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students speak positively.

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).

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 Grace Academy Solihull, Birmingham, B37 5JS

Thank you to those students who gave up their lunch breaks to meet with inspectors and to all students who discussed their work and views with inspectors.

Inspectors judged your academy to be a satisfactory. The Principal and his team of senior and middle leaders are working hard to raise the level of your achievement. To this end, staff monitor your progress, your behaviour and your attendance much more rigorously. The quality of the curriculum offered to you and the quality of teaching you experience in lessons is improving. Despite these changes, there are still areas that need further improvement. I have asked the Principal to focus on raising your achievement by:

- ensuring that all staff apply the sanctions and rewards policy consistently and rigorously in all lessons and at all times around the academy and that all students take more responsibility for their own behaviour (many of you who completed the questionnaire commented on the poor behaviour in lessons)
- ensuring that teachers match learning activities in lessons to the needs of each of you so that you are all able to make good progress
- ensuring that you use the helpful written comments teachers provide to improve the quality of your work.

Students at Grace Academy have very good relations with their teachers and other staff. All of these staff are very committed to helping you all to achieve as well as you are able to. You must therefore help them to help you by attending regularly (you cannot learn if you do not attend); by behaving in a responsible manner that demonstrates that you respect other students and your teachers; and by working hard in all your lessons (which will demonstrate how much you respect yourselves and your future potential). By doing these three simple things, you will improve your achievement, and ultimately your future life chances.

Yours sincerely

Gwendoline Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector

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