

The Weston Road Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137553
Local authority	Not Applicable
Inspection number	386196
Inspection dates	27–28 February 2012
Lead inspector	David Driscoll

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	847
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	106
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Wise
Headteacher	Greg Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2008
School address	Blackheath Lane Stafford ST18 0YG
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Driscoll	Additional inspector
Chris Fallon	Additional inspector
Bob Roberts	Additional inspector
Susan Thomas	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed the teaching in 34 lessons, as well as visiting further lessons and activities for shorter periods to evaluate pupils' behaviour and safety. A total of 34 teachers were observed teaching. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. They took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's records of pupils' progress, safeguarding documentation, behaviour records and results of the school's checks on the quality of teaching. The inspection team analysed the responses of the 132 parents and carers to the inspection questionnaire.

Information about the school

The Weston Road Academy is smaller than the average secondary school. It converted to an academy in October 2011 and there have been no significant changes made to its arrangements for admissions, accommodation, facilities or staffing. Its mathematics and computing specialism remains the same. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is below average and represents a range of different learning needs. Around 94% of pupils are of White British heritage. The rest of the school population is made up of very small numbers of students from a wide range of different minority ethnic groups. The school meets the current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. There have been a number of changes at middle management level since the previous inspection.

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	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is improving quickly as a result of good leadership and management at all levels, including the governing body. The sixth form is now good. Behaviour has improved significantly and is good. The school is not yet good because teaching is not fully meeting the needs of the more-able students and there are weaknesses in the quality of marking. Students are provided with good opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development outside of lessons, but these are much more limited in lessons where evaluation of provision for it is insufficient.
- Students leave the main school with broadly average standards of attainment having made satisfactory progress from their average starting points. Achievement is good in the sixth form, where attainment is above average.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Students respond very well to teachers' consistent expectation that all students will behave well at all times. Parents, carers and students all agree that the school is a very safe place in which to be educated. Good behaviour and positive relationships result in an orderly and effective climate for learning.
- Teaching is satisfactory, but improving. Middle- and lower-attaining students are given appropriately demanding tasks and often make good progress. Teaching is good in the sixth form where more innovative techniques actively engage a larger proportion of students in lessons than is sometimes the case in the main school.
- The school is being driven forward by a strong senior leadership team, who are well supported by other managers. Staff are unified around and strongly support the headteacher's vision. The careful analysis of areas for improvement in teaching allows professional development to be accurately matched to the school's needs. The result is seen in the steadily rising proportion of lessons taught to a good or better standard each year.

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?

- Ensure that more-able students are always given suitably challenging tasks in order to accelerate their progress and increase the proportion of A* and A grades at GCSE to above the national average by July 2013.
- Ensure that all teachers mark students' work frequently and systematically to ensure that students are clear about the next steps necessary to improve their work and raise their achievement.
- Systematically review and evaluate the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in lessons in order to identify additional opportunities for the promotion of this aspect of their learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Parents and carers say that their children achieve well. Inspectors found achievement to be satisfactory, but improving. There has been little difference in the progress of different groups in the school in recent years. This is now changing as improved teaching is accelerating the progress of middle- and lower-attaining students. As a result, the school's latest assessment information shows that the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is likely to be above average this year. However, attainment overall remains average because the proportion of students currently achieving grades A* and A standard remains below average. The progress of more-able students is slower than that of others and a gap is opening between their performance and that of their peers. Examination results in mathematics and computing-based courses are among the best in the school, as befits the school's specialist status.

The difference in progress between students of differing abilities was noticeable in the lessons observed. Where learning was good, all students were made to think and work hard. They applied themselves diligently to the tasks and made good progress because tasks were adapted to meet the needs of the most able, while those finding the work more difficult received support just when they needed it. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson, for example, more-able students skipped the first task and moved to a more difficult one, while others were given helpful hints when they became stuck that enabled them to get going again. In a minority of lessons, students were all given the same task, regardless of their ability. The more-able students worked through these quietly and efficiently, but their progress slowed when they finished and had to wait for others to catch up. Some students remain too quiet and passive in lessons, but this is not the case in the sixth form where students are keen to engage in discussion and make good progress.

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Disabled students make good progress. Their achievement is better than that of others because teachers are provided with comprehensive and clear guidance on how to adapt teaching to meet their needs. Simple hints, such as where to place speakers for deaf students or when physically disabled students should be allowed to use a laptop, are followed consistently and allow such students to overcome barriers to their learning. Other students with special educational needs make similar progress in line with that of their peers. The work is often suitably demanding for them, but teaching assistants do not always provide extra support at the optimum point in a lesson. Those students who arrive at the school with below-average standards in reading are well supported through extra literacy lessons. They make good progress and the gap in their performance and that of their peers is quickly closed.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers think that teaching is good. Students are also very positive about the quality of teaching. Students in the sixth form comment that teaching in the sixth form is better than that which they experienced in other years. Inspectors found that, although it is improving, there is not enough consistently good teaching to ensure that all groups of students make good progress in the main school.

Throughout the school, including the sixth form, students are encouraged to 'have a go' without fear of failure. This was particularly noticeable in an art lesson where outstanding teaching enabled students to learn basic techniques before moving rapidly on to applying them to a new situation. In a sixth form English lesson, students became the teachers, asking demanding questions of their peers, and demonstrating the same high expectations of all groups of students that are common among staff in other sixth form lessons. Across the school, there is a great deal of collaborative work which helps to develop students' speaking skills and promotes their social development. Some teachers take advantage of opportunities to extend discussions to moral, cultural and spiritual issues, for example, how to provide a better service in the tourist industry to groups such as the physically disabled or Buddhists monks, but this good practice is the exception rather than the norm. Teachers consistently reinforce the learning of new vocabulary in discussions across the school. Students who join the school as below average readers are taught in very small groups where support is accurately matched to their individual needs.

There is too much variation in the quality of marking in Years 7 to 11. Students in some science classes, for example, receive highly detailed written feedback on every piece of work. Such marking tells them exactly what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. Other classes have not had their books marked at all for long periods, which reduces their understanding of how well they are doing and how they are to improve their achievement.

Effective changes have been made to the curriculum to meet students' needs and boost the achievement of lower-attaining students. The GCSE course in drama, for

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example, was changed after students underachieved. They are now making much better progress on the vocational performing arts course.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents, carers and students strongly support the inspectors' view that behaviour is typically good and that all groups of students are safe. All are adamant that bullying is very rare and limited to 'name calling'. The reason for the minimal instances of bullying lies with the school's detailed and comprehensive recording of incidents, early involvement of parents and carers, and the way that unacceptable behaviour is changed by positive interventions which also protect the victim. Those using racist remarks, for example, are taken out of lessons for a day for an intensive course that is successful in changing their attitudes and ensures they do not reoffend. Those students who have special educational behavioural needs receive good guidance that enables them to control their emotions and behave as well as others.

Behaviour has improved considerably since the school was last inspected. There has been only one permanent exclusion since 2009 and fixed-term exclusions have fallen to a below-average level. Attendance has continued to improve and is above average. Most notably, the exclusion and attendance record of disabled students and those with special educational needs is much better than that seen nationally. Students enjoy school, are positive about education and are keen to do well. They are polite, respectful and considerate of others. There is rarely any need for a teacher to overtly control behaviour, but if needed the school's behaviour policy is always implemented consistently. Sixth form students are good role models for their peers.

Leadership and management

The school's senior leaders, including members of the governing body, are driving up the quality of education provided through good quality self-evaluation that covers all aspects of provision. At all levels they strike a good balance between accountability and supporting development. They have already had great success with behaviour and safety, while achievement is improving after a period of consolidation. Systems for tracking students' progress are now comprehensive. Efforts to improve teaching are now bearing fruit in terms of raising achievement of middle and lower attainers. The sixth form has improved markedly since the previous inspection and is good. Key to the school's improvement is its uncompromising stance taken on tackling inadequate teaching, together with new appointments to management posts that have contributed to the school's good capacity for further improvement. Strengths and areas for improvement in teaching are identified accurately and training provided for all staff to ensure any weaknesses are rectified. The school has already identified the priority to strengthen the provision for more-able students in order to raise overall achievement to a good level. Members of the senior leadership team have strengths in pastoral care, progress data analysis and quality assurance that complement each other so all key areas of leadership and management are in very capable hands. The governing body is well informed, challenging and ensures that

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safeguarding requirements are met.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets the needs of most students well. Changes to the curriculum in science are successfully addressing underachievement by providing students with sufficient time to study the subject. There are good opportunities to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through clubs, such as the faith club, or through enrichment days. Opportunities in lessons have not been systematically reviewed or evaluated as effectively and so are inconsistent across the school. The school places a very strong emphasis on tackling discrimination and such incidents are rare. There are few differences in the progress of groups of pupils, although a gap is opening between more-able students and others. Provision does not meet the more-able students' needs as effectively as it is currently doing for those of other students. Parents and carers are kept very well informed of their children's progress through excellent reports and very early contact should the need arise. They hold very positive views of the school.

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.



29 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of The Weston Road Academy, Stafford ST18 0YG

Thank you for all the help you gave us when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed talking to you. You, your parents and carers and your teachers can feel rightfully proud of the way you conducted yourselves. We found your good behaviour to be a key feature of the school.

Overall, we found that you are receiving a satisfactory education but, like you, we recognise that it is improving quickly. You leave the school with broadly average results, but these are now rising. Some teaching is outstanding. The school's leaders are taking a robust approach to tackling any weak teaching, so you are making better progress in lessons. Some of the most able among you are still not making as much progress as others. So we have asked your school to make sure that you are always given tasks that are difficult, but not too hard, so that you can learn as quickly as possible. You can help by asking for more difficult work when you find it too easy or when you need more to do. Some of you benefit from very good marking, so you know exactly how to improve your work and grades. However, this varies according to which class you are in, so we have asked your school to make sure that all work is always marked in such a helpful way. Your teachers are good at giving you the chance to work in groups and develop your social skills. You have good opportunities to learn about deeper spiritual, moral and cultural issues outside of lessons, but we want your school to make sure there are more such opportunities in lessons.

Those of you in the sixth form receive a good education. We agree with your view that the teaching is better in the sixth form, where there is more use of innovative techniques that better engage your interests, so your progress is good.

With all best wishes for your future

Yours sincerely

David Driscoll
Lead inspector

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