

# Strood Academy

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	135964
<b>Local authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	381987
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 March 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Meena Wood 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>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1319
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	193
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mark Hunt
<b>Headteacher</b>	Richard Hart
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	N/A
<b>School address</b>	Carnation Road Strood ME2 2SX
<b>Telephone number</b>	01634 717121
<b>Fax number</b>	01634 726643
<b>Email address</b>	office@stroodacademy.org

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<b>Age group</b>	111–19
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	77–8 March 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	381987



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## Introduction

Inspection team

Meena Wood	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kate Griffin	Additional inspector
Kevin Dyke	Additional inspector
Isobel Randall	Additional inspector
Matthew Portal	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 39 teachers teaching 39 lessons, of which five were joint observations with members of the senior and middle leadership teams. In addition, inspectors visited six 'intervention' sessions. Meetings were held with six groups of students, academy staff, including senior and middle leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and four governors, including one parent governor. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the academy's work and looked at a number of documents, including the academy's development plan and self-evaluation, case studies of students whose circumstances that may have made them vulnerable, the safeguarding and equality policies, and the minutes of meetings of the governing body. In addition, they analysed 143 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and others completed by students and staff.

## Information about the school

This academy is larger than most secondary schools and has an average-sized sixth form. The academy specialises in business, enterprise and mathematics. The proportion of students entering or leaving the academy other than at the usual times is in line with the national average for secondary school. An average number of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is above average, as is the proportion of those with a statement of special educational needs, most having behavioural, social, emotional and learning difficulties, and a significant number with specific or moderate difficulties or autistic disorders. The vast majority of the students are White British with a much smaller number from an Indian heritage. A very small number of students speak English as an additional language. The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

**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

<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 and sixth form. The majority of parents, carers and students are positive about the quality of education and care provided. Since becoming an academy, GCSE results have significantly improved over the two years from well below the floor standard. The academy is not judged as good because, although students start from a significantly low base, they demonstrate satisfactory progress in mathematics, science and English.
- Teaching is satisfactory with much that is good. Where lessons match students' needs and abilities through well-structured tasks and teachers check learning, students make good progress. Some lessons lack sufficient challenge; assessment activities and marking are not always employed effectively to plan future learning. In the sixth form, induction and lesson activities often do not extend students' learning, particularly their critical thinking or writing skills.
- Effective support for disabled students, those with special educational needs and boys results in the majority making satisfactory progress. Attendance is now broadly in line with the average. While the academy works actively with external partners to help students stay involved in education and provides a range of stimulating opportunities to raise aspirations and achievement, it does not yet fully engage all parents and carers in their children's learning.
- Students behave well, feel safe and most are keen learners. Previous high levels of exclusions have reduced significantly, owing to the structured, well attended interventions and rigorous monitoring of students with unacceptable behaviours. The vast majority of students progress to post-16 education, employment or training.
- The leadership team has been successful in overcoming many of the challenges it has faced. More stable staffing, a personalised curriculum and effective actions have reduced, although not quite eliminated underachievement, and resulted in significant improvements in teaching and standards in Key Stage 4.

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?

- Accelerate the progress of underachieving students across the school, in all subjects and key stages by:
  - matching teacher expectations, lesson activities and tasks to students' attainment levels and needs
  - engaging more parents and carers in their children's learning
  - more rigorous monitoring by senior and middle leaders of students' work over time, especially in the sixth form.
- Develop greater consistency in assessment across subjects by ensuring that:
  - all teachers build on identified good practice
  - information on students' abilities, knowledge and skills is used to plan more challenging lesson activities and tasks which extend their learning
  - the regular marking of students' class and homework consistently tells students how to improve
- Improve attainment in the sixth form through:
  - a structured transition that prepares students thoroughly for the demands of AS and A level courses
  - greater development of students' higher order thinking and writing skills

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

The majority of parents and carers believe that achievement is good for students in Years 7 to 11. Inspectors judge that while the achievement of some students is good, the majority make satisfactory progress. In the last two years, the proportion of students attaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has risen significantly and is now just below average. Examination results in the sixth form are below the national average but in the last year, the school's actions have begun to address weak performance in AS level subjects effectively and this year's results are predicted to be broadly average.

Students make satisfactory progress overall given their exceptionally low starting points and the majority are keen to learn when given well-structured opportunities in lessons. They settle quickly and, where lessons have clear objectives and tasks in line with their abilities and skilful questioning by teachers, they make good progress. However where lessons are insufficiently focused on extending learning, students make satisfactory progress. For instance, in a global citizenship lesson, too much teacher talk and insufficiently planned group activities did not deepen students' understanding of humanitarian disasters.

Assessment information is used highly effectively to provide targeted out of lesson support for many students at risk of underachieving. As a result of a range of well-attended and rigorously monitored interventions, such as the 100 Club, Kickstart and Springboard sessions, previously underachieving groups, those with low levels of

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self-confidence or erratic or poor attendance and those receiving support at school action, are making satisfactory progress. However, as the school acknowledges and inspectors' observations confirm, not all boys are as engaged in their learning as their peers, especially in English. In the smaller Years 10 and 11 groups, students of lower ability receive personalised support in English and mathematics and this structured focus on their speaking, writing and numeracy skills is helping them make satisfactory, and in some cases, good progress. The focus on literacy skills and pride in neat presentation of students' work are not in evidence in all lessons.

### Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and improving, with much that is good. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is not as good as in the main school, although inspectors observed better teaching of BTEC courses. Where teachers plan lessons in line with students' needs and abilities, asks are well structured and teachers check what students are learning. This ensures that all students are fully engaged and acquiring appropriate levels of knowledge and skills. In one Year 10 media lesson, students responded enthusiastically to the structured writing of a crime scenario, and made good progress in their lateral and creative thinking skills, and discussed moral perspectives. In particular, the academy's literacy strategies are having a positive impact in improving reading skills for some students as they subscribe to the magazine club and receive one to one tuition. In these good lessons, teaching is frequently used perceptively to support students' social and spiritual development. The responses from parents, carers and students to the inspection questionnaires reflected the majority view that teaching is good. In those lessons where teaching is only satisfactory, and in a few cases inadequate, this is because teachers' expectations and planning are not effectively matched to students' prior knowledge, skills and needs, and they do not check students' learning often enough. For instance, in one sixth form lesson with a diverse mix of students of differing abilities and prior knowledge, the activity was insufficiently challenging for those working at the higher level and did not encourage all students to develop their higher-order thinking and writing skills. Assessment activities, such as peer- and self-assessment, are used inconsistently across subjects. Where these activities are employed well, students reflect and understand what they have learnt and, importantly, what they need to do next. The marking of students' work does not consistently provide information about where students have been successful and what they need to do to improve. Even where teachers do provide good quality information, there is less rigour in the follow up and teachers do not ensure that work is completed or that students use the helpful information to improve. The quality of the targets and feedback similarly varies, so that in some lessons, students are not clear about precisely what they need to do to attain their targets. In science, students receive structured and detailed information that helps them progress well in their learning. Parents, carers and students are of the view that a more consistent approach is required to the setting of homework and to the quality of teachers' feedback.

### Behaviour and safety of pupils

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Students reported that they feel safe in school and that most adults are approachable if they have concerns. Most students behave courteously towards one another and adults. In one Year 12 BTEC sports session where students were training primary school children, inspectors observed outstandingly mature and responsible behaviours. Despite high levels of concerns over behaviour reported by parents and carers, behaviour is satisfactory around the school and largely so in lessons. In a small minority of cases, where lessons are insufficiently absorbing or where students do not understand their work, a number lose attention, misbehave and distract others.

The school's effective exclusions, sanctions and rewards policies, together with rigorous monitoring, have resulted in reducing incidences of bullying and anti-social behaviour. Students whose circumstances have made them vulnerable told inspectors how the school has helped them to improve their attendance and behaviour significantly. Notably, older students greatly value mentoring roles with younger students and they express confidence in the school's systems for dealing with bullying, as this has resulted in a cohesive community.

### **Leadership and management**

The academy's principal and vice principal have provided good leadership on the priorities of raising achievement and improving behaviour and attendance. Self-evaluation processes are sharply self-critical and thorough and include input from all staff, and confirm this is an academy that knows its strengths and where it needs to improve. Much has been done to raise the aspirations of staff and students and establish a well-integrated, learning community in the face of considerable external and internal challenges. Senior managers have worked hard with middle managers to improve the quality of teaching and behaviour through coaching and professional staff development. The school has an accurate view of the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 11. However on 'AS' and 'A' level courses, there is insufficient focus on students' acquisition of knowledge, higher-order thinking and writing skills. This is especially critical in view of the low starting points and in many cases, poor literacy skills of sixth form students.

Effective internal support and excellent partnership work with external agencies are combining well to mould the positive ethos of the school. Efforts to involve more parents and carers in their children's learning include the much appreciated family learning sessions for cooking, numeracy and dyslexia, a lively and informative website, and achievement and motivation evenings for Years 7-11. The academy is aware that these have been more successful for some groups than others and is prioritising reaching out to those who do not engage with it.

The impact of the curriculum on students' outcomes is good. The school has used its specialism and associated partnerships with the University for the Creative Arts to raise students' aspirations. For instance, a level 1 Year 10 group focusing on key employability and team working skills has successfully reformed more challenging behaviours. In addition, students broaden their horizons through citizenship studies

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and a range of extra-curricular activities that they greatly value which effectively develop their social and cultural skills and spiritual development. Restorative justice and conflict resolution help students understand the impact of their anti-social behaviours on others and the difference between right and wrong. However, in lessons, there is insufficient use of students' prior knowledge to deepen their general knowledge and understanding.

Personalised pathways guide students appropriately onto vocational courses. Year 7 students benefit from a positive transition from primary school. In Year 8, students receive good advice and guidance on their Key Stage 4 options. Sixth form students reported that the quality of course guidance in Year 11 and 12 had much improved recently, enabling students to consider their choices in depth, although induction processes do not prepare students well enough for the demands of A level courses.

The strong governing body and academy sponsors fulfil their statutory obligations for safeguarding and very effectively support the leadership team, in line with the academy's equalities plans, in improving the attainment and progress of different groups of students. Sharp monitoring of students' performance in Years 7 to 11 has resulted in attainment and attendance improving from a very low base. Academy leaders have demonstrated their ability to bring about sustained improvement and this has been acknowledged within the local community and by most parents, carers and students. All this indicates a good capacity for further improvements.



## 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 school	46	46	8	0
Primary school	8	47	40	5
Secondary school	14	38	40	8
Special school	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All school	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.**



9 March 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Strood Academy, Strood, ME2 2SX**

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your academy recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and were impressed by how polite you were and by your attitudes towards your learning. Well done on improving your attendance and behaviour and attending the additional classes the academy provides for you to improve your learning!

Strood Academy is a satisfactory academy with a satisfactory sixth form. Most of you enjoy your lessons and make satisfactory progress. In many lessons we observed well-planned tasks and activities, but in others, planning was not clear enough to help you to make the progress of which you are capable and teachers were not always checking your learning. However, the school is providing those of you who need it, especially in Year 11, with good subject support outside lessons. Stimulating extra-curricular opportunities and strong encouragement from all staff to behave well and focus on your learning help you to develop as responsible citizens and you receive good guidance on your next steps. Some of you in the sixth form told us that you value the greatly improved monitoring of your academic progress and virtually all of you go on to training, university or jobs when you leave.

We have asked the school's senior leaders to:

- improve your GCSE and A-level results in all subjects, by giving you more detailed feedback on your work and ensuring that teachers plan suitably challenging activities for you
- monitor your progress in lessons and the marking of your work more closely to ensure that no-one underachieves in examinations and assessments
- involve your parents and carers more in your learning so that they can support you in your studies and where necessary, help you improve your behaviour and attendance.
- provide you with a structured transition into the sixth form to prepare you thoroughly for the demands of your courses.

Yours sincerely

Meena Wood  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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