

The Open Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135650
Local Authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	361312
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Community
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	509
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	72
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Cracknell
Headteacher	Jon Platten
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. They observed 27 teachers and 22 lessons in the main academy and 5 in the sixth form. They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and three groups of students. They observed the academy's work and looked at a range of documentation including 60 questionnaires from parents, 119 from students and 29 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following questions.

- Do students feel that life at the academy is safe, healthy and enjoyable?
- Does the curriculum and the quality of teaching enable students of all abilities to achieve what is expected of them?
- How effectively do teachers and managers use assessment data to monitor students' progress and intervene to support those at risk of underachieving?
- How effective is the monitoring conducted by leaders and managers and to what extent are these procedures embedded?
- How effective is the quality of provision in the sixth form?

Information about the school

The academy opened in September 2008. It moved into new buildings in September 2010. The academy is smaller than most secondary schools. It has a small but growing sixth form, part of 'The Kett' partnership with two other local schools. The academy serves a local community in north Norwich. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. Most students are White British, very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students that have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs are above the national average. A principal was appointed in April 2010. The academy specialises in engineering and in the environment. It holds the Healthy School award and is part of the National Challenge initiative, designed to support schools in improving their GCSE examination grades in English and mathematics.

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: how good is the school?**4****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this academy requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The academy is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement of all students, to their behaviour and the procedures in place to manage it, and to governance which is not fulfilling all of its statutory responsibilities.

Since opening in 2008, the academy's leaders and managers have made satisfactory progress in establishing and driving some improvements. These include the successful transfer to new buildings, improving the quality of teaching which is now satisfactory, increasing attendance rates to above the national average and extending the Key Stage 4 curriculum. Good procedures for safeguarding students ensure they are kept safe and enjoy the new facilities and opportunities provided for them.

Nevertheless, attainment remains low and achievement is inadequate. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching combined with the poor behaviour of a small but significant proportion of students has a detrimental effect upon learning and progress, including for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Inspectors observed some inadequate teaching and only a small proportion that was better than satisfactory. Consequently, the rate at which students learn in lessons is not good enough to make up for deficiencies in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Although headline results in Key Stage 4 have improved over the last two years this is a direct result of interventions to boost the performance of students capable of attaining grade C or above in their GCSE examinations, and masks consistently low results in a range of subjects.

Exclusions have fallen significantly from the high rates recorded last year as procedures for managing students' behaviour have become established. However, inspectors noted that a small but significant number of students are regularly removed from lessons and placed in the internal exclusion room. Concerns expressed by students and staff confirmed that a minority of students regularly disrupt lessons and highlighted inconsistencies in how behaviour is managed by staff. Although sanctions are in place to address poor behaviour, there are few rewards given on a day-to-day basis for those students who cooperate well and work diligently. The majority of students said that they enjoy life at the academy but they would like more lessons to be enjoyable, practical and fun. They talked enthusiastically about their new surroundings, their personal lap-tops and the friendliness of the academy. They lead healthy lifestyles and make a satisfactory contribution to the wider community. However, the student council is under-developed and has little influence.

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A satisfactory curriculum meets the needs of most students. The academy's second specialism, in the environment, is beginning to enhance learning within and outside the curriculum, but its engineering specialism is having little impact on raising students' achievement. Pastoral care from year teams and house heads is effective in supporting the needs of students, including those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Discussions with students in Years 9 and 11 revealed that they would appreciate further guidance when opting for future courses and post-16 education.

The principal has shared his ambitions for the academy with staff and brought new rigour to its work. He is ably supported by a large team of senior leaders. Early successes include improvements in students' attainment, signifying satisfactory capacity to improve. As yet, however, roles and responsibilities are not sufficiently focused on raising the achievement of all students. Self-evaluation is detailed but too generous in its views of the quality of teaching and the behaviour of students. The use of assessment data is increasingly systematic but staff are unable to clearly illustrate the progress of all students in all key stages against the targets set for them. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body are regular visitors to the academy and provide effective support for senior leaders. However, attendance at governors' meetings is too low and, overall, governance is inadequate. Statutory duties to promote community cohesion, which is inadequate, are not met. Value for money is inadequate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the rate of students' learning and progress in all lessons by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion of good or better teaching to at least 50% by the end of 2011.
 - stimulating students' interest and enthusiasm by making lessons more interesting, fun and including more practical activities
 - embedding procedures to monitor progress and use this data to ensure that students of all abilities achieve the targets set for them.
- Improve behaviour by:
 - clarifying the agreed policy for behaviour management and enlisting the full support of all staff to ensure that procedures are applied consistently
 - introducing incentives to reward good behaviour
 - developing the student council to foster the support and commitment of all students in meeting the aims and expectations of the academy.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance by:
 - streamlining the senior leadership team so that roles and responsibilities are clearly focused on raising achievement
 - giving the leader of the sixth form full responsibility for raising standards and improving the quality of provision
 - actively promoting community cohesion so that by the end of 2011 students have a thorough understanding of different faiths, cultures and what it means to live in modern British society

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- encouraging all members of the governing body to engage fully in the work of the academy.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

Standards in Key Stage 3 over the past two years have been well below national average, particularly in science and information and communication technology (ICT). Observations by inspectors found that in some mathematics and science lessons students in Year 9 make inadequate progress. A larger percentage of students attain Level 6 in mathematics compared with English but by the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is higher in GCSE English than in mathematics. The proportion of students attaining five A* to C grades has increased to 53%. The percentage attaining five C grades including English and mathematics has also risen to 33% which is above the national minimum floor target.

However, GCSE results in most subjects are consistently low. Results in design technology, science, drama, modern foreign languages and geography show little sign of improvement. For the past two years a group of lower-attaining students has not been entered for GCSE examinations and consequently the percentage attaining five A* to G grades is well-below average. Value-added data shows that the progress made by students in 2009 was much better than that found nationally, but this has not been maintained in 2010. Currently, too many students in Years 10 and 11 make, at best, satisfactory progress in lessons which is not enough to ensure that they will meet their targets.

Good attendance is helping students to develop the right habits for the work place and secure their economic well-being, which is satisfactory. Students told inspectors that, at times, bullying does occur, but they know which member of staff to approach to deal with it. Students eat healthy food and participate regularly in physical education, but feel that advice on leading healthy lifestyles provided in personal, social and health education is minimal. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted satisfactorily through a range of subjects and in assemblies, which include time for reflection and thought. Strengthened cultural links are shown by the academy's achievement of the first stage of the International School award.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	4
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	4
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. However the proportion of good or better teaching is low with little that accelerates students' progress or addresses the shortfalls in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Consequently, standards remain low. Action has been taken to improve the quality of teaching. A common lesson plan is used by most teachers to plan learning in phases, to share learning outcomes with students and engage them in planning and evaluating their work. Teachers show a growing understanding of the use of data to monitor progress and assessments are much more regular. However, in a significant proportion of lessons, time is not used effectively and the pace of learning is too slow. Teachers set tasks without timescales, so students work without urgency and are not pressed to complete work promptly. Most teachers use interactive whiteboards to illustrate learning but students have few opportunities to use ICT in lessons even though they have personal computers. In the least effective lessons, teachers fail to capture students' interest or enthusiasm, and students' behaviour deteriorates once their interest wanes.

The Year 7 curriculum has discrete opportunities to promote students' literacy and numeracy skills but in other years these skills are not regularly reinforced. An increasing range of vocational awards complement existing GCSE courses and the academy is forging new partnerships with other local providers to increase opportunities for its students.

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Students participate in a satisfactory enrichment programme but say that they would like more educational visits.

Pastoral care arrangements have been strengthened by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of tutors, year heads and heads of house. The care and support for students that have special educational needs and/or disabilities is generally satisfactory but a disproportionate number of them are referred to 'the bridge' room because they have misbehaved in lessons.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The principal has initiated a number of improvements, most notably to the quality of teaching and in raising teachers' and managers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving. Staff are increasingly made much more accountable to senior leaders. Short and long-term improvement plans are in place to improve the academy's effectiveness. Regular monitoring is providing senior leaders with a better understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. They are fully committed to improvement and have taken action to address weaknesses in teaching and subject leadership. However, more needs to be done to secure greater consistency. Subject leaders are increasingly engaged in self-evaluation but the variability of their leadership is evident in the results achieved by the same students in different subjects, and in those subjects where results are consistently low.

Leaders and managers of the academy have worked effectively with stakeholders to overcome a number of difficulties since its opening. The establishment of a parents' forum which surveys their views and improves communication is helping to foster good relations with parents and carers. The academy promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination satisfactorily by treating all students fairly and encouraging all individuals to engage in curricular and extra-curricular activities. Promoting community cohesion is inadequate because the academy does not have a strategy in place to develop students' understanding and experience of different faiths, cultures, and what it means to live in a diverse society.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	4
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Sixth form

The sixth form is satisfactory. Numbers are small but increasing. The majority of students make satisfactory progress in a broad range of entry level, GCSE and vocational awards and Advanced level courses, delivered on the academy site or at other schools in the partnership. Satisfactory teaching and a broad curriculum enables students to achieve results which, although below national averages, represent satisfactory achievement based on their starting points. Students say that they would like more support for their learning in lessons and for their well-being in tutorials as they feel that monitoring of their progress is not regular or sufficiently detailed. This is confirmed by their attendance which is significantly lower than in the main academy. They feel safe and value the advice offered to them on the next stage of their learning or employment. Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, this is currently the role of the vice-principal whose other duties means that he cannot dedicate all of his time to raising standards and improving the quality of provision in the sixth form.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

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Views of parents and carers

Only a small proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire. Responses show that senior leaders have the overwhelming support of these parents and carers. Over 90% are satisfied with their child's experiences at the academy and feel that their needs are fully met. Their main concern is about how the academy deals with unacceptable behaviour, which they feel could be improved. Inspectors agree with their view in this aspect.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Open Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 60 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 509 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	35	33	55	5	8	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	45	32	53	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	28	47	29	48	3	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	22	37	34	57	3	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	14	23	41	68	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	20	38	63	5	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	20	40	67	4	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	32	37	62	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	32	36	60	3	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	32	31	52	6	10	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	23	37	62	4	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	30	37	62	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	45	28	47	2	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



Friday 19 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Open Academy, Norwich, NR7 9DL

Thank you for welcoming us to your academy and taking the opportunity to talk with us. In particular I would like to thank those of you who met us at the academy entrance on arrival and the groups of students who joined us in meetings.

We were most impressed with the academy's new buildings with its marvellous facilities to help you learn. We noted your good attendance and that standards attained are rising steadily. However, we also found that your academy requires some significant improvements. Many of you do not make the progress you are capable of because teaching does not accelerate your learning and because a small minority of students misbehave in lessons. This disrupts your learning and slows your progress. We also found that you have too few opportunities to develop an understanding of different faiths, cultures, and what it means to live in a diverse society. We have therefore given the academy a 'notice to improve' which means that inspectors will visit again to check on the progress being made. We have asked your senior teachers to do the following:

- monitor your progress more closely, include more practical activities in lessons and make them more interesting and enjoyable
- manage behaviour consistently and introduce new rewards for good behaviour on a daily basis
- develop the student council to gain the support and commitment of all of you to meet the aims and expectations of the academy
- review the responsibilities of senior leaders, including in the sixth form and ensure governors promote community cohesion.

The principal and the senior management team are improving the academy. You can all help by behaving well and encouraging those around you to act much more responsibly, and by sharing your views with him about other improvements you would like to see.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector

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