

Hereford Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135662
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	364399
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2011
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	752
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Whitmey
Headteacher	John Sheppard (Principal)
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. The inspection team observed 35 lessons, taught by 35 teachers. Meetings were held with the Principal, nominated staff, members of the governing body and a colleague from the Department for Education. Inspectors observed the academy's work, looked at a wide range of documentation and met with groups of students. The inspection team reviewed 35 questionnaires returned by parents and carers. A total of 110 student questionnaires were evaluated.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The nature of the improvement secured in standards and achievement since the academy opened in September 2009.
- The accuracy of the academy's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning.
- The balance of curriculum provision available in all key stages.

Information about the school

The academy is smaller than the average secondary school. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The ratio of girls to boys varies annually. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is a quarter of the national figure, and the proportion of those who speak English as an additional language is low. The proportion of students registered by the academy as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national figure and so is the proportion with a statement of special educational need. There are a small number of children who are looked after by the local authority.

The academy is sponsored by Hereford Diocesan Board of Education and has links with Worcester University. The academy has specialist status in science, sport and health. The academy has also received the following national accreditations: Investors in People, the ECM Mark - Gold standard, the NAPTA award for inclusive staff development, the International School's Award, the ICE award - Investing in Community Engagement, and the Leading Parent Partnerships Award.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is a good school. Care, guidance and support are outstanding and the multi-agency work that supports students and their families is exceptional. All seven of the

- outcomes that relate to the Every Child Matters agenda are good. These include: the enhancement of the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; their adoption of healthy and safe lifestyles; their future economic well-being; and their positive contribution to the community. It was particularly pleasing to note that behaviour was good and that attendance levels are above average and have risen significantly since the academy opened.

Achievement and the extent to which students enjoy their learning are good. Academic standards are rising rapidly and are satisfactory overall. Results in English and mathematics continue to improve but remain significantly below the national average and this remains the focus of a great deal of work within the academy. The strengths evident in science, physical education and health, the academy's specialisms, have been significant factors in the rise in standards and achievement. Students make good progress overall and those of average or below average ability often progress very well. Student progress in English and mathematics has not been as strong as in other subjects, although early results from the 2011 GCSE examinations are notably more positive than the equivalent outcomes secured in previous years. The students' current learning and progress show evidence of further improvement. However, this could be stronger if all subjects placed greater emphasis on developing subject-specific literacy skills. Similarly in mathematics, younger students have yet to develop a greater understanding of the key methodology to be employed. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress overall as a result of the impact of well-judged intervention strategies and the students' positive attitudes to learning. The small numbers of students who represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds and those vulnerable due to their circumstances make good progress.

Teaching is good overall; however, this could be stronger if all students were required to become participative learners. The use of assessment to enhance teaching and learning is good but could be developed further. For example, in an outstanding Year 11 English literature lesson a recently completed assessment task provided diagnostic individual guidance and two tasks that required significant student participation and thereby created outstanding learning. Evidence from this inspection confirms the findings of the academy's robust monitoring of teaching and learning. Marking is good and some exceptional practice was seen.

The curriculum opportunities provided are good with significant breadth of provision and exceptional individual choice. Well-conceived intervention strategies have proved successful in addressing the shortcomings identified in the students' previous education.

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Further curriculum expansion is underway. Recently students have been entered for examination in the three separate sciences, although provision in modern foreign languages remains limited.

The care, welfare and guidance provided are excellent. Parents and carers, as well as students, are full of praise for the wide range of support available. The academy has a very strong track record of nurturing disengaged individuals back into education and has done well in its work with persistent absentees.

The governing body and the leadership team have done well to secure the early completion of their new buildings and students will move into impressive facilities in September. Self-evaluation is generally accurate, if a little modest, and the leadership team has done very well to secure significant improvements in academic standards, teaching and learning, equality of provision, the sixth form, behaviour and attendance. This demonstrates the academy's outstanding capacity to improve further.

Inspectors received consistently positive comments from parents and carers during this inspection. One comment summed up the views of many: 'Since my son has been at The Hereford Academy I have been overjoyed with the outstanding pastoral and academic support he has been given.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve standards in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring all staff use assessment to enhance learning in the manner of the academy's most effective lessons
 - enhance subject specialist literacy across the curriculum
 - ensure the younger students understand and record the methodology employed in mathematics.
- Ensure that teachers plan and lead effective opportunities in lessons that require all students to become participative learners.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

In 2010, the proportion of students securing five higher grade GCSEs was significantly above the national average. However, the proportion securing five higher grade GCSEs including English and mathematics remained well below the national average. Public examination outcomes already secured for 2011 are notably more positive. Overall progress is strong with value-added outcomes among the top five percent in England. Although the academy has done well to improve student achievement in English and mathematics, progress in these two key subjects remains notably weaker than in other areas.

The students' current learning and performance in the classroom mirrors the improvement shown by the most recent examination results. In the majority of lessons, students make good progress. Outcomes are strongest where there is a clear focus on what the students are expected to learn and students respond well to this challenge. In an outstanding Year 11 BTEC sport lesson, students were required to evaluate and guide their peers work as they strove to complete final assignments. The task was very well planned to match the

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examination criteria and vulnerable individuals were sensitively nurtured towards their deadlines.

Students, parents and carers are very positive that students feel safe in the academy and inspectors observed very good staff/student relationships to support this view. The academy provides good support for a healthy lifestyle. A wide range of school meals is available and take up is above the national average; the proportion of students engaged in sport is high. The students' contribution to the school and wider community is good although sixth form students feel they could do more to support their younger peers.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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 academy has an accurate and detailed understanding of the strengths of teaching and has tackled weaknesses effectively. As a result, in the majority of lessons students make good or sometimes better progress. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan activities that motivate and interest the students and produce good resources to enhance their enjoyment. In many cases this includes the use of new technologies, for example data projectors, interactive whiteboards or digital cameras. Relationships are positive.

In the most effective lessons challenging tasks help all to make progress by drawing them into peer group discussions that deepen their understanding. Where learning is less successful, some common features are observed. Some tasks have too low a level of

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challenge for some students, because all are expected to complete the same tasks. Teachers do not give individuals sufficient opportunities to collaborate and discuss their work and therefore enhance their understanding and ability to express themselves succinctly in oral exchanges and written tasks.

Teachers use assessment information to plan the starting points for their lessons and use a satisfactory range of assessment strategies to check students' understanding as the lesson proceeds. However, not all staff use this information to best effect. Occasionally, lengthy whole-class question and answer sessions slow the pace of learning for groups of students, particularly those who are less confident in volunteering answers. A common strength of assessment is the regular reference to level of work expected.

The breadth and balance of the curriculum provided has been important to the improvement of standards and achievement. The strength of the academy specialisms in science, sport and health has been a significant factor. The English and mathematics curriculum has yet to be as successful as the specialist subjects. The key strength of the curriculum is a strong focus on employability and the exceptional level of individualisation offered to students. As a result, many progress well from low starting points.

The care, guidance and support offered are outstanding. Transition arrangements from primary schools are very strong and personalised support for individuals is highly regarded by students, their parents and carers. The support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective. Significant numbers of students have been nurtured back into education from complex personal situations. As a result of the high quality care there are clear positive outcomes: behaviour is good and attendance is above the national average, having risen an exceptional 2.4% in the last academic year. The proportion of former students not in education, employment or training has improved dramatically to a point where it is in line with the national average and above the local authority average.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team have effectively embedded ambition and driven improvement since the academy opened. Leadership has strength at all levels and some of the more recent changes are already proving effective. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching are outstanding. Senior staff were invited to accompany inspectors in the joint observation of teaching: the views they expressed consistently concurred with the judgements given by inspectors. Equality of opportunity is good because of the consistent and successful efforts made by all staff to support vulnerable students.

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Governance is good, with a clear focus on enhancing provision at every level and an accurate view of the academy's strengths and those which require further development. The academy's safeguarding procedures are good with strengths in staff recruitment and training. Engagement with parents and carers is outstanding: the effectiveness of the pastoral support programme would not be possible without high quality parental dialogue.

The academy's partnership working is good. A constructive relationship with local post-16 providers has allowed the academy to grow an effective sixth form. Community cohesion functions very strongly at the local level although the national dimension needs further development. Senior staff and the governing body deploy resources effectively and the academy provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students make good progress from relatively low starting points and there are individual success stories where achievement is outstanding. This success is as a result of carefully designed courses that are tailored precisely to individual needs. This flexibility is made possible because of productive partnership arrangements with workplace training providers and a detailed knowledge of individual needs. A focus on developing students' employability is having a positive impact on the number of students not in education or employment with training when they leave, which has fallen from well above average to a figure that is in line with that found nationally. Students develop their basic skills well and the provision successfully promotes personal qualities that will help them to succeed, such as self-confidence and an awareness of the need to keep mentally fit through leisure activities. There is a limited range of extra-curricular provision, but it is well attended. Attendance post-16 is high.

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Leaders recognise that there are currently limited opportunities for students in the sixth form to make a positive contribution to the rest of the academy, not least in acting as role models for younger students. Teaching and assessment are good, including that provided off-site, because systems to monitor the quality of provision are rigorous. Students confirm that they enjoy the practical nature of the lessons and appreciate the detailed guidance they are given on how to improve their work. The academy recognises that developing students as independent learners is an area for further development. Personal 'wrap-around' support is provided and is directly responsible for the strong personal outcomes. The sixth form is well led and leaders have a clear vision for how they want the provision to develop to meet local and the academy's needs. As a result, numbers are rising and outcomes are improving.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Although a limited number of parents and carers chose to complete the inspection questionnaire, their views of the academy were overwhelmingly positive. Over 90% of parents and carers are happy that their child enjoys their education, is kept safe, makes good progress and is well taught. All agreed that the academy was led and managed effectively. The results of the student questionnaire matched that of their parents and carers but were more positive regarding behaviour, the progress they made in lessons and the support provided.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hereford 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 35 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 752 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	15	43	19	54	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	11	31	23	66	1	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	13	45	16	55	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	16	46	17	49	2	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	8	23	27	77	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	34	18	62	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	26	24	69	2	6	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)	10	29	23	66	1	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	11	31	23	66	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	32	24	65	1	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	41	15	52	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	12	34	22	63	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	54	15	43	1	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.



20 May 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Hereford Academy, Hereford, HR2 7NG

As some of you may remember, inspectors visited the academy before half term and I would like to thank you for the courtesy we were shown. Many of you gave your time to speak to us and that was very helpful, thank you.

The inspectors were impressed by every aspect of the life of the academy. You make good progress, your behaviour is good and the improvement you have made in your attendance in the last year has been exceptional. Well done!

Teaching and learning are good and so is the curriculum. We were very impressed by the choice of courses available and the care, guidance and support provided for you is excellent. Your new buildings will be open in September and I have asked the Principal to:

- help you improve your standards in English and mathematics by making the best possible use of your completed assessments and by improving your key literacy and numeracy skills
- ensure that lessons always require your active participation.

I enjoyed visiting the Hereford Academy and look forward to hearing of your future success.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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