

The Open Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135650
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	381912
Inspection dates	6–7 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Martin Cragg HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Independent
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	553
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	68
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Cracknell
Headteacher	Jon Platten
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 November 2010
School address	Salhouse Road Norwich NR7 9DL
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 29 lessons involving 28 teachers. They met with groups of students, staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. They observed the academy's work, and looked at its improvement plan, assessment information, records of monitoring and evaluation, and the governing body's policies and minutes. They reviewed responses to questionnaires from 37 parents and carers, 119 students and 74 staff.

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

- How well do particular groups of students, such as girls and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make progress in relation to their targets, particularly in English and mathematics?
- How effective are the systems for managing students' behaviour and do students show positive attitudes to learning?
- How effectively do senior and middle leaders monitor performance, evaluate progress and identify priorities to drive improvement in outcomes for all students?

Information about the school

The academy is smaller than the average sized secondary school and has a very small sixth form, although student numbers are rising. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above average. Most students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. The academy has specially resourced provision for special educational needs for up to 12 students with autistic spectrum disorders. It has specialisms in engineering and the environment. It belongs to the Kett partnership offering sixth form provision in conjunction with two other schools.

The academy opened in September 2008 and moved into new buildings in September 2010. At its last inspection in November 2010 it was given a notice to improve in relation to students' achievement and behaviour, and governance.

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?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the academy no longer requires significant improvement. The academy has improved markedly since its last inspection and now provides a satisfactory education for students. Achievement is satisfactory because the attainment of Year 11 students in 2011 improved and exceeded the academy's challenging targets, although it remains well below average. Year 11 students made satisfactory progress from their low starting points. In other years, progress is accelerating. Students' behaviour has also improved and is satisfactory. The academy is calm and orderly between lessons and in breaks. The governing body now has a clear understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for development and holds senior leaders to account.

Senior staff set a clear direction for the academy and identify relevant priorities for improvement arising from rigorous monitoring of performance. Senior leaders' evaluation of the academy's performance is accurate and they drive improvement effectively, tackling any underperformance promptly. Increasingly, middle leaders accept accountability for performance in their areas. However, their roles are not fully developed and the quality of outcomes across subjects is inconsistent. The academy's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory because of the rapidly improving progress of students and improving trends in students' attendance, behaviour and achievement.

The academy is a harmonious community where students say they feel safe. They behave well around the academy, respect each other and mix well. Their attendance is above average. Since the last inspection, students' attitudes to work have improved and most try hard. However, across subjects the presentation of work often lacks care and this affects the quality of writing. In the best lessons, students show that they can take responsibility for their learning and speak confidently when challenged to do so. In other lessons, teachers do not always use questions well enough to develop their ideas or expect them to work independently. Teaching is improving and there are clear objectives for learning in all lessons. In planning learning, however, too many teachers do not match work closely enough to students' differing abilities so that all are challenged to make good progress. Although there are examples of very good marking, teachers do not always give clear enough guidance to students on how to improve their work.

The curriculum is broad and reflects the needs of students well, providing a wide

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choice of courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form through effective partnerships with local schools, colleges and other providers. Staff know students well and those whose circumstances may at times make them vulnerable receive very effective support. Staff monitor students' progress closely and promptly identify those needing additional support. These students have made at least satisfactory progress as a result of flexible provision and targeted assistance. Procedures for keeping students safe are very thorough and established well across the academy. The specially resourced provision for students with autistic spectrum disorders is effective in meeting their needs, building their confidence and enabling them to follow some courses with their peers. As a result they make at least similar and often better progress than their peers.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in Key Stage 4 by:
 - increasing teachers' expectations of students' presentation skills and the quality of their writing
 - building students' confidence to express their opinions and work independently
 - improving achievement in subjects where results have been weaker.
- Improve the use of assessment by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use assessment information effectively to match work more closely to students' differing abilities
 - use a full range of questions to check students' understanding and develop their thinking
 - provide clear guidance in their feedback to students on how to improve their work.
- Improve leadership and management by developing the role of middle leaders to ensure that they take a full part in monitoring performance, evaluating progress and driving improvement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students enter the academy with attainment which is low. By the end of Year 11 attainment is well below average but it has improved steadily since the academy opened. In 2011, the proportion of students achieving five or more higher GCSE grades improved to 61%, closing the gap on the national average. The proportion achieving this including English and mathematics rose to 36%, exceeding the minimum standard expected for secondary schools. However, there is still too much

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variation between subjects with results in science, some aspects of design technology, physical education and geography being low in 2011. Year 11 students made satisfactory progress overall from their low starting points. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities made at least satisfactory progress. Although the attainment of girls was lower than boys overall, this reflected the profile of ability on entry to the academy and they made similar progress to boys. The academy's assessment information for the current Year 11 indicates that they are on track to improve on the 2011 results, especially in English and mathematics, and that most other year groups are exceeding the targets set for them.

In the lessons observed, students made satisfactory progress overall and often good progress. They listen well, settle to work promptly and collaborate effectively in pairs and small groups. Younger students show real enjoyment of their learning and demonstrate positive attitudes to their work, for example when practising vocabulary orally in modern foreign languages and setting up an experiment in science.

Students get on well with each other and report that any bullying is dealt with effectively. They show good understanding of how to keep themselves safe because of an effective personal, social and health education programme. Students' behaviour has improved markedly. The rate of behaviour referrals and exclusions has fallen by half in the last year because staff now set clearer expectations for students and use the reward and behaviour policy consistently. Students enjoy sports and other activities, and understand the need to eat healthily. An increasing number take responsibility through the expanded student council or as prefects, ambassadors or members of the 'green team'. They have a sound understanding of the world of work. However, although students' information technology skills are good, their literacy and numeracy skills are not as strong. Students show interest in moral and social issues with all ages contributing thoughtfully to discussions in tutor groups about different aspects of charity work and fund-raising ideas.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

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

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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	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is improving. Teachers have sound subject knowledge and plan lessons with clear objectives for learning. They form good relationships with students and use a wide range of activities which help them settle to work. In the best lessons, teachers challenge students and maintain good pace in learning. They check students' understanding regularly and adjust activities to move learning on or to consolidate areas where students are not secure. For example, in a mathematics lesson, students who understood how to write numbers using standard form then went to help others who were not sure. However, teachers' use of assessment is not consistently effective. Similarly, some marking contains very clear guidance expressed as targets for improvement, but this is not the case in all subjects.

The academy has adapted the curriculum well to meet the needs of different students. Students in Key Stage 4 choose from a good range of courses, including vocational and applied options. This has led to improving achievement, better attendance and a very low proportion of leavers who do not enter education, employment or training. In Key Stage 3, there is a strong focus on literacy and reading, although this is in its early stages. The academy has expanded time for English at both key stages. The specialism in the environment benefits the curriculum through links across subjects and a week of themed activities. Students participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and events, including trips to other countries.

Staff know students well and monitor their progress closely. They use this information effectively to identify particular students who require additional support. The academy works well with a wide range of agencies to provide support for students with a wide variety of needs. Students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable spoke highly of the care they receive. This includes targeted work to improve behaviour and attendance. Staff regularly contact their parents to inform them of progress and arrange further support. Students appreciate the rewards system and this contributes to their improving behaviour and attitudes to learning. They say that they receive appropriate guidance on making choices about their future. Induction into the academy is thorough and younger students have settled in well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The principal and senior staff set high expectations based strongly on raising achievement. Effective action plans have driven improvement since the last inspection so that performance is now satisfactory and improving. Senior staff use close monitoring and analysis of outcomes to identify accurately the priorities for improvement and self-evaluation is accurate. They set suitably challenging targets for achievement and have developed an effective system for monitoring students' progress against these targets. Increasingly, middle leaders respond positively to greater accountability and they are beginning to contribute to the regular monitoring of performance in their areas of responsibility. Senior staff monitor the quality of teaching rigorously and analyse the resulting information to target support and training. The clear focus on specific aspects of teaching, such as setting objectives and using a range of activities, has improved learning.

The governing body ensures that statutory requirements are met. Its members set a clear strategic direction for the academy and have increased their direct involvement with staff through link roles and regular meetings. They review key performance data and evaluate progress against targets so that they know the academy's strengths and its areas for further development. The academy seeks the views of parents and carers regularly through surveys and postcards available at parents' evenings. A high proportion of those who responded to the questionnaire said that they were well informed about their child's progress.

The academy promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination well. Staff monitor the progress and well-being of different student groups closely and this shows that no group underachieves compared to others. The academy is an increasingly harmonious community in which students are valued equally and mix well. Community cohesion has an increasing place in its planning. There are developing links with local primary schools and environmental groups. Students from different backgrounds mix well as a result of increased awareness of staff and students' heritages in assemblies. There are also increasing opportunities for students to mix with young people from different cultures, for example recently hosting students from Barbados and Spain. The academy works hard to engage the community through use of its facilities. The effective range of partnerships locally has widened the range of courses for students and provided experiences which contribute to their improving well-being.

Safeguarding has a high profile across the academy. There are very clear and rigorous procedures for ensuring that students are safe and this is endorsed by the

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very positive responses in the questionnaires from students, parents and carers. Staff and governors receive regular training and have a strong understanding of their responsibilities.

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The sixth form is small but numbers are growing. Students enter Year 12 with attainment which is below average. In 2011, results of the small number who took A level courses were broadly average and students made at least satisfactory progress. Eight of the eleven students went on to higher education. Results in other courses are in line with national averages. Retention rates are in line with those found nationally. Students contribute to the academy by hearing younger students read and helping in subject areas. The partnership with local schools ensures a wide range of subject choice. Teaching is at least satisfactory and students say that they enjoy their courses. For example, students contributed well to discussion in English literature, but showed less confidence in a GCSE mathematics lesson. Staff monitor students' progress closely and tutors provide effective support through weekly interviews. Students say that they receive sound guidance on their next steps in education or employment. The head of the sixth form has a clear understanding of the areas that need improvement and is working within the academy and the partnership to hasten developments.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	3

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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

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned questionnaires was lower than that found across academies nationally. Those who made comments differed widely in their views of the academy but there were no specific issues that were commonly raised. Some parents and carers spoke very highly of the work of the academy and the support they had received while others expressed an opposite view.

Inspectors also referred to a recent survey of parents and carers conducted by the academy which had a larger return rate and this clearly showed improving satisfaction across most areas of the academy's work.

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 37 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 553 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	13	35	18	49	5	14	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	15	41	20	54	1	3	1	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	15	41	19	51	2	5	1	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	8	22	24	65	3	8	2	5
The teaching is good at this school	7	19	28	76	1	3	1	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	16	26	70	3	8	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	4	11	26	70	5	14	1	3
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)	8	22	20	54	6	16	2	5
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	19	22	59	5	14	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	16	25	68	5	14	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	27	18	49	6	16	2	5
The school is led and managed effectively	7	19	22	59	4	11	4	11
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	11	30	20	54	1	3	3	8

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



8 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Open Academy, Norwich NR7 9DL

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your academy. We enjoyed talking with you in lessons, meetings and at breaks. Thanks also to those of you who filled in a questionnaire. Your views helped us find out about the academy.

The academy provides you with a satisfactory education and is improving rapidly. It no longer requires a notice to improve which it was given after the inspection in November last year. Since then, the attainment of Year 11 students has improved although it remains well below average. Year 11 students made satisfactory progress. The academy's information on your progress shows that most of you are on track to reach or pass the targets you have been given. Your attendance has improved and is above average. Your behaviour has also improved and fewer of you are now referred to 'the Bridge' from lessons. Your teachers set clear objectives in lessons and encourage you to learn. You benefit from a wide choice of courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Many of you receive extra help with your reading and literacy. There is a broad range of activities, events and trips and more of you take on responsibility in the academy. Staff know you well and you told us that you receive good support from them. You said that you feel safe and know who to go to with any problems.

We asked the academy to improve some areas of its work. These were to:

- raise attainment in Key Stage 4 and reduce the variation in results between subjects
- improve teachers' use of assessment to help you learn
- develop the roles of subject and pastoral leaders.

You can help by improving your presentation and the quality of your writing, contributing to discussions and continuing to concentrate on your work.

We enjoyed our visit to your academy and wish you success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg
Her Majesty's Inspector

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