

# University of Chester CE Academy

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	135941
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	381969
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 March 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Bernard Campbell 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>	Voluntary Controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	940
<b>Of which number on roll in the sixth form</b>	140
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rt Revd Dr Peter Forster
<b>Headteacher</b>	Kevin McDermott
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Woodchurch Lane Ellesmere Port CH66 3NG
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 338 2400
<b>Fax number</b>	0151 338 2406
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:info@UCEAcademy.org">info@UCEAcademy.org</a>

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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Bernard Campbell  
Shirley Gornall  
Bernard Robinson  
John Dunne

Her Majesty's Inspector  
Her Majesty's Inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited forty two lessons, observing 41 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff, the vice-chair of the governing body and a representative of the sponsors from the University of Chester. Inspectors observed the academy's work and scrutinised the academy's plans, records, analysis of data and self-evaluation. Inspectors analysed 56 inspection questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 57 staff questionnaires and 150 student questionnaires.

## Information about the school

The University of Chester Church of England Academy opened in September 2009. It is sponsored by the University of Chester, Cheshire West and Chester Council, and the Diocese of Chester. The academy is currently on the sites of the two predecessor schools and will move to a new building in October 2012. Following amalgamation, staffing was restructured and reduced and this continues in preparation for the move to one site. The academy is a larger-than-average secondary school with a sixth form. It has fewer than average minority ethnic students. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. The proportion of students supported at school action, by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is high. The academy did not reach the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' 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>3</b>

## Key Findings

- The academy provides a satisfactory education for its students. The Principal communicates a clear strategic vision for the academy and has skilfully led major and complex changes in amalgamating the predecessor schools. Attainment and attendance are higher than at the predecessor schools. The redesign of the curriculum, and improvements in the quality of teaching, have begun to improve the quality of learning and the progress of all students, including those in the sixth form. Lesson observations and reviews of performance have led to robust action to tackle weaknesses in teaching and in management. The academy has a satisfactory capacity to improve.
- Although rising attainment is still considered low and for this reason the academy is not judged as good. Teaching is not consistently strong enough to support a rapidly improving trend in attainment across all subjects and to foster a positive approach to learning in all groups of students.
- Nonetheless, achievement is satisfactory. The proportion of students who gained at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, increased markedly in the first year of the academy's operation but declined in 2011 due to low achievement in mathematics. However, better teaching is resulting in improvements in students' progress overall and in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall and has begun to overcome the legacy of underachievement which the academy inherited. Teaching ranges from outstanding to inadequate. Current teaching in the sixth form is also satisfactory and progress is improving in Year 12 where courses are better matched to students' abilities than previously.
- The behaviour, attendance and safety of students are satisfactory. Attendance fell markedly when students had to attend a different school site as a result of the amalgamation. Effective action has led to a dramatic improvement in attendance. The standard of behaviour is variable. Most students behave well, especially in Years 7 and

8. A small minority, mainly boys, lack positive attitudes to learning and their inattention occasionally slows their own and others' learning.

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?**

- Improve achievement by:
  - identifying and tackling the gaps in students' knowledge and understanding in mathematics
  - ensuring that students consistently make at least satisfactory progress in all subjects in the sixth form.
- Improve the achievement and the attitudes to learning of a small minority of students who are reluctant to learn, many of whom are boys, are known to be eligible for free school meals or have special educational needs, by:
  - raising their aspirations
  - meeting their needs more consistently
  - challenging their behaviour more effectively
  - insisting on punctuality to lessons
  - reducing persistent absence
  - further developing their skills in literacy.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching by:
  - eradicating the small amount of inadequate teaching
  - ensuring that planning consistently meets the range of students' needs in each class
  - more frequently challenging students to use higher order thinking skills
  - providing more opportunities for students to take risks, take responsibility and work more independently
  - extending the good practice in giving verbal and written feedback.
- Ensure that leaders and managers use data to evaluate students' progress and behaviour more sharply and consistently and to drive improvement more rapidly.

## **Main Report**

### **Achievement of pupils**

Although attainment is low, students' achievement is satisfactory overall. In 2011, GCSE results declined because the year group was weaker, attendance fell and students made inadequate progress in mathematics. However, early entry GCSE results in mathematics indicate that current Year 11 students are making better progress in mathematics. Low results in history were due to a weakness in teaching which has been tackled. At all key stages, students' progress in English is improving. They achieve well in dance. Boys, especially those of lower ability, students known to be eligible for free school meals and students supported by school action plus, underachieve. This is due in part to a reluctance to learn by a small minority of lower ability boys in the older year groups, and by higher levels of persistent absence among Year 11 students.

Learning across the academy is improving, especially in Years 7 and 8, where the design of the curriculum and the quality of teaching is promoting better progress. The support for literacy and for those with disabilities and special educational needs has enabled lower attaining students to make better progress. However, these aspects of provision have not been in place for long enough to have an impact on the achievement of older students. Improved attendance in the current Year 11 provides a firmer basis for improved achievement in 2012.

In good or better lessons, particularly in Years 7 and 8 and in performing arts subjects, students are highly motivated, cooperate well in teams and create their own work. Students express their own ideas and opinions and enjoy engaging with different points of view. They respond well to the challenges set and work with sustained concentration to meet the demands of the teacher. Where learning is weaker, a small minority of students, especially some boys in the older year groups, have negative attitudes and can be resistant to taking part in planned activities, particularly if these involve writing. They sometimes work slowly, show a lack of respect, and on occasion they disrupt lessons which affects the progress of other students. Almost all parents and carers said that their children are making good progress and that their needs are met. Inspection evidence shows that a minority of students have not achieved as much as they should.

Progress and attainment in the sixth form is stronger this academic year as a result of improvements in provision. This is helping to counter some underachievement in A and AS level courses in 2011, when sixth form students made insufficient progress, particularly in mathematics and history. Progress in English was satisfactory as was the progress of the small number of students on vocational courses. Effective action is being taken to improve teaching in mathematics and history. The academy recognised that some courses were not matched to students' abilities and needs so has extended the range of vocational courses in Year 12.

## **Quality of teaching**

Most students and parents say that teaching is good. However, inconsistencies in quality mean that teaching is satisfactory rather than good. Improvements in teaching are leading to better achievement for students in the younger year groups who have been in the academy since it opened. In the older year groups, teaching has not yet overcome previous underachievement.

In the stronger lessons, teachers plan well-linked tasks using different learning styles, which successfully engage students' interest and enthusiasm. Teachers' subject knowledge and repertoire of strategies enable students to take risks and learn independently. For example, in an outstanding music lesson, excellent use of technology enabled students to create and refine a soundtrack for a film. In some lessons, for instance in English and dance, students are regularly challenged to develop their thinking and extend their skills. Questioning by some teachers is incisive and probing, as was the case in an effective history lesson where students explained the causes of conflict in Abyssinia. In the best lessons, teachers make good use of information about students' individual needs to promote progress. For example, in the skills-based curriculum in Years 7 and 8, teachers had a clear understanding of the needs of students and guided them accurately. Literacy and numeracy skills were carefully integrated into these schemes of work. Interesting and enjoyable cross-curricular themes promoted younger students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Self- and peer-assessment were also used well to develop understanding and promote progress.

In inadequate lessons and some that are satisfactory, including in mathematics, expectations are undemanding or work is incorrectly pitched and is sometimes too easy or too difficult. Work is not always adjusted to match the range of students' literacy levels. Consequently, some students with weaker literacy skills or who are reluctant learners make less progress in some lessons than their peers. Some lessons place too much emphasis on giving information and not enough on exploring students' thoughts and opinions, limiting opportunities for reflection and personal development. On occasion, teachers rely too much on volunteers to answer questions and this leads to disengagement by some others. Students know their levels and targets well. However, the frequency and effectiveness of teachers' feedback is inconsistent. Good practice was observed in English and science. In some subjects marking is perfunctory with insufficient guidance on how to improve. There is some variability in the teachers' management of behaviour, including their response to lateness.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students, parents and carers are less positive about behaviour than about other aspects of the academy. Inspectors found a mixed picture. Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are better in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 9 to 11, where a small minority of students sometimes display a reluctance to work hard and occasionally disrupt learning. The academy has a greater impact on the behaviour of younger students who have benefited most from the redesign of the curriculum and from teaching that is accurately meeting their needs. Rates of exclusion have reduced since the academy opened and are below average. Staff work effectively with parents, carers and other agencies to overcome the challenging behaviour of a few individuals. However, insufficient use is made of data to identify quickly patterns of poorer behaviour and to target strategies at particular groups. Incidents of bullying are infrequent and students are confident these are dealt with effectively. Students feel safe and manage risks appropriately in practical lessons.

A marked fall in attendance was caused by the resistance of a few students and parents to travelling to a different site following the integration of students across both sites. Staff overcame this with a robust approach and new strategies for working with students and their families. Attendance in the current year has risen significantly to its highest level and is currently close to the national average. However, persistent absence remains too high, especially in Year 11. On occasion, a lack of punctuality between lessons leads to a loss of time for learning. Some teachers have higher expectations than others of students' prompt arrival to lessons.

### **Leadership and management**

The Principal communicates a clear strategic vision for the academy. Well supported by the senior team, he has skilfully led the large-scale and complex changes that have been implemented since the academy opened. The amalgamation of two schools with different values, identities and curriculum courses has been carried out effectively, despite remaining on two separate sites. The third phase of restructuring and staff reduction, in preparation for the transfer to a single site, has a clear rationale and is being carefully managed. This is bringing about a reduction in the numbers and layers of management which limited the sharpness of accountability and speed of action. At all levels staff demonstrate a shared commitment to bring about further improvement and are optimistic about the opportunities that the new building will bring.

The academy achieved early success in bringing about a marked improvement in achievement after its first year of operation. This was not sustained into the second year. In the current year, internal measures of improving student progress and the significant increase in attendance are reliable signs of continued improvement. This trend demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve.

The curriculum has been unified and thoughtfully redesigned to meet the range of students' needs at all key stages. The new curriculum in Years 7 and 8 has improved attitudes and skills for learning and provides a firm foundation for increasing the rates of progress made by students. Performing arts and the cross-curricular thematic learning in Years 7 and 8 contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

A variety of professional development strategies has been implemented which has improved weaker areas of teaching. These strategies have not been equally effective across all subjects. Strategies have not made sufficient impact on overcoming the legacy of lower achievement by boys, those eligible for free school meals or with special educational needs. Decisive action has been taken to tackle weaknesses in teaching and in management. There are a few continuing weaknesses in middle leadership that the academy has identified. Data have been used well to drive the improvement in attendance. However, data are not always used with sufficient rigour to evaluate and improve students' progress or their behaviour.

The academy's leaders have worked effectively to improve engagement with hard-to-reach parents and carers, using a wide range of strategies and the effective support of other agencies. Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the academy and the wider community and provide valuable expertise. They are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and make a positive contribution to bringing about improvement. The academy's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.



## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](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.
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 University of Chester CE Academy, Ellesmere Port, CH66 3NG**

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your academy. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. We came to the conclusion that the academy provides you with a satisfactory education. Lots of improvements have been made in a short period.

These were some of the main things we found in our inspection.

- Achievement is satisfactory overall but weaker in mathematics. Although sixth form students did not achieve well last year, there have been significant improvements to the sixth form curriculum and teaching which mean that achievement is much better now. A small minority of older boys, including some with special educational needs, underachieve.
- You are making better progress because teaching is improving. However, variations in the quality of lessons remain and we would like more teaching to be consistently good and outstanding.
- In your questionnaires the majority of you said that behaviour is satisfactory in lessons but there are occasions when a few misbehave. We agree. Attendance has improved a lot this year. Well done!
- Leaders have effectively managed the big changes since the academy opened and the quality of your education is improving.

To help the academy to improve, we have asked that senior leaders should:

- improve your achievement in mathematics and in the sixth form
- improve the achievement and the attitudes to learning of a small minority of students who are reluctant to learn, many of whom are boys
- increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching
- use data to evaluate your progress and behaviour more sharply to bring about more rapid improvement.

I hope you all continue to do your best, especially in mathematics, and work hard to achieve your potential.

Yours sincerely

Bernard Campbell  
Her Majesty's Inspector

