

Park Hall Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135971
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	381994
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2012
Lead inspector	Paul Brooker HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
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	1076
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Derek Smart
Headteacher	Tony Morrison (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
School address	Water Orton Road Castle Bromwich Birmingham B36 9HF
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

Harkireet Sohel

Additional Inspector

Simon Blackburn

Additional Inspector

Clare Saunders

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. In total, the inspection team made 42 lesson observations of 42 different teachers, some which were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including students' work, the academy's self-evaluation and student tracking data, and evaluated the arrangements made for safeguarding. Meetings were held with nominated staff, groups of students and representatives of the governing body and the Academy Trust. No returns were available from the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) but inspectors analysed inspection questionnaire responses from 96 parents and carers, 104 students and 18 staff.

Information about the school

The academy opened in September 2009 in the new accommodation of its predecessor, Park Hall School. It is sponsored by the Arden Academy Trust and has performing arts and mathematics as its specialist subjects. Most staff transferred from the predecessor school, but financially-induced savings dramatically reduced the academy's senior leadership team in its first year. The current senior leaders and some key middle leaders were new appointments.

The academy is larger than the average secondary school. Its increasing popularity is reflected in the year-on-year increase in first choice applications for Year 7. Most students are White British and speak English as their first language. A large majority come from the immediate locality, but a significant number travel from further afield, including Birmingham. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national figure. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is well above average. The academy meets current floor standards, which are the minimum standards expected by the government.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Park Hall Academy has made impressive improvements since it opened, and is achieving significantly better outcomes year-on-year. However, its overall effectiveness is satisfactory, rather than good, because the high quality of its provision has not yet impacted across all areas of its work. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Students, staff, parents and carers are unequivocal about the academy's improvements, particularly in behaviour, teaching and the curriculum. However, inspectors agree that specific aspects of its work need strengthening, particularly where standards are too low and when some students' attitudes are a barrier to good progress and achievement.
- Achievement is satisfactory because learning and progress are broadly satisfactory and often good. Standards are rising strongly and gaps in performance are narrowing quickly, but attainment remains below the national figures in important respects, particularly in mathematics.
- Teaching is good. There is a core of high quality practice, much of which is outstanding. Continuous improvements in teaching and the curriculum are well led and underpin the academy's ongoing development. Rigorous assessment is well embedded and effectively steers students' progress and improvement.
- Behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Most students behave impeccably in lessons, are keen to do well and have positive attitudes to learning. The academy enjoys a safe and orderly climate. However, the recalcitrant attitudes of a small minority of students present an ongoing challenge.
- The sixth form is good. Post-16 provision has strengthened since the academy opened. Students make impressive progress from their starting points, particularly in vocational subjects.
- The Principal has steered the academy's development with skill and determination. Systematic monitoring of performance and rigorous self-evaluation have strengthened senior and middle leadership, improved provision and ensure that the governing body is suitably well-informed. The academy has demonstrated strong capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Narrow the remaining gaps in attainment and in students' rates of progress so that, in 2013, the performance of different groups equals or exceeds national figures in English and mathematics by:
 - securing consistently high quality teaching, particularly in mathematics
 - ensuring that the most-able students are suitably challenged.

- Strengthen students' attitudes so that behaviour across the academy is consistently good by:
 - raising expectations about students' individual responsibilities
 - developing students' self-esteem, social skills and independence
 - improving the aspirations and attitudes of the most disaffected students, including their attendance and punctuality

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Standards are rising securely and strongly, but patterns of attainment and rates of progress are rather variable. Published data indicates that students make accelerated gains in Key Stage 3, from starting points that are generally at or below average. The academy's flexible Key Stage 4 curriculum pathways enable all Year 11 students to secure at least five higher grade GCSEs or equivalent qualifications, so that Key Stage 4 average points scores significantly exceed the national average. However, attainment is significantly lower than the headline figure when performance in English and mathematics is included. In recent years, too few students have made the expected progress in these core subjects because teaching has been too variable. Students with lower starting points make particularly good progress, as do disabled students and those with special educational needs and those known to be eligible for free school meals. However, some groups, such as more-able boys, perform less well. Inspection evidence confirms that standards are rising strongly, although the quality of learning is not consistently good and the most-able students are not always sufficiently challenged. Nonetheless, well-structured teaching in English and mathematics lessons is beginning to accelerate the progress that students make in these core subjects, and ensure that students develop essential skills in literacy, including reading.

Evidence from lesson observations confirms the views of parents and carers that progress is accelerating. The quality of learning was good or better in the majority of lessons observed during the inspection, including a significant number where students made outstanding progress. Learning is sharply focused on specific objectives that are shared with students so that they know what they might achieve. Learning and progress are most rapid when teachers set ambitious outcomes and fully engage students in assessing their own understanding and progress. The seamless engagement of students in self-review and peer-assessment is a strong feature of the best lessons. Students know their targets and what they need to do to improve, and they were seen to readily engage in the process of self-review,

particularly in practical subjects such as physical education and performing arts.

The quality of learning in the sixth-form lessons is a notable strength. Lessons are well-structured and challenging. Sixth-form students make good progress from their starting points, and exceptional progress across most vocational courses and in the performing arts specialism.

Quality of teaching

A large majority of teaching is consistently good and much is outstanding. Despite some remaining weaknesses, teaching has notably strong features. Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour, and good relationships between adults and students establish a positive climate for learning in most lessons: most students settle quickly, sustain their concentration and are happy to volunteer answers. Interactive whiteboards are very well used to structure and review students' learning, and teachers' exposition and modelling of work is often of a high quality. Lesson planning is sharply-focused on subject-specific outcomes, but also considers how students can develop wider skills and understanding, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, the best lessons translate detailed planning into high quality learning by preparing tasks that actively engage all students with carefully structured pair and group work. Giving students the opportunity to develop and refine their thinking and rehearse their responses builds their understanding and promotes more self-confident learning, but gives teachers a platform for more challenging and probing questions. Most lessons strike the right balance between teacher input and independent learning. However, the level of engagement varies because some students lack the confidence or skills to articulate their ideas, and teachers sometimes rely too heavily on firing untargeted questions from the front of the classroom.

Assessment is a notable strength of teaching because it is routinely embedded into lessons. Teachers use detailed assessment information effectively, including about students' particular learning needs, to plan suitably challenging work for different groups. Students themselves are regularly engaged in assessment and target-setting through peer- and self-review which helpfully evaluates strengths and priorities for improvement. In media studies, for example, Year 11 students collaborated on technically-impressive productions, but engaged in a sharply-focused and analytical evaluation of one another's work in order to improve their own productions. Although the impact of marking varies widely, students know what they can achieve and understand how they can improve.

The academy's well-structured programme of professional development, underpinned by effective monitoring and support, ensures that teaching is constantly improving. Many of the academy's newly qualified staff quickly develop into excellent teachers.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The good behaviour and positive attitudes of the large majority of students ensure that the academy enjoys a settled climate for learning. Students recognise different types of bullying, including cyber bullying, and are aware of how to avoid it. They

say that they feel safe at school and are confident that the academy will deal effectively with any concerns that they might raise. They say that adults are alert to all forms of bullying and are swift to address any incidents that occur.

In lessons, students routinely comply with teachers' expectations and try to do their best. However, the willingness of most students to work hard and volunteer answers sometimes conceals the reticence or apathy of others. Lessons are orderly, but parents and carers raise valid concerns that the disaffection of a small minority of students occasionally causes low-level disruption. Good teaching nurtures positive attitudes and challenging behaviour is usually well managed, but when groups are occasionally unresponsive teachers have to work hard to promote effective progress. The indifference of a small minority of students is reflected in comparatively high levels of persistent absence and lateness to school, and a swathe of litter at the end of break and lunch times shows some students' lack of consideration for their otherwise immaculate academy. The academy recognises the ongoing challenge of raising aspirations and outcomes for its most hard-to-reach students and endeavours to ensure that all students develop the social skills and personal attributes that prepare them effectively for adult life. Most students respond to these expectations. Exclusions have reduced dramatically since the academy opened and, although still below average, attendance is improving steadily.

Leadership and management

Under the expert guidance of the Principal and his senior team, the academy has made impressive strides in improving provision and raising standards. Nonetheless, the academy is well aware of the ongoing challenges and the areas for further improvement. The relentless focus on strengthening teaching has, rightly, been a key priority and is developing model practice. However, senior leaders are determined to give all students equal opportunity to succeed and recognise the need to further accelerate rates of progress in key subjects, improve attendance and punctuality, and strengthen the behaviour and attitudes of the small number of disaffected students. None of the inspection findings came as any surprise because the academy's own procedures for monitoring are systematic, and self-evaluation is impressively rigorous.

The academy has suitable strategies for communicating with parents and carers, including those who have found working with the academy difficult. Parents and carers, like staff and students, are very positive about the academy's improvements and achievements, but they also identify weaknesses, particularly in regard to achieving consistency in managing disruptive behaviour. The academy's highly flexible approach to curriculum development, including the promotion of a suitably wide range of extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities, has contributed positively to student engagement and raising standards. Pastoral systems provide excellent support and guidance for students facing particular difficulty or disadvantage. The focus on the individual needs of each student ensures that gaps in the progress and performance of particular groups are narrowing. The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is carefully woven into the curriculum and through the programme of assemblies and tutor time.

The governing body provides a suitable level of support and challenge, for example by encouraging partnerships to promote wider opportunities and positive community engagement. The academy values the support for mathematics provided by the sponsor academy. The academy's robust arrangements for safeguarding meet all current requirements and ensure that students feel safe.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



27 April 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Park Hall Academy, Solihull B36 9HF

Thank you for the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We really enjoyed talking to you and seeing your work. Your views, alongside those of your parents and carers, were helpful in confirming our first-hand observations and the academy's own evaluation. The academy's strong trajectory of improvement is obvious, but we judged its overall effectiveness to be satisfactory because standards in English and mathematics are not yet high enough. We were most impressed with:

- the improvements since the academy opened, particularly in raising standards
- the high quality of the majority of the teaching, much of which is outstanding
- your good sixth-form provision
- the way the academy is led and managed.

You were quick to point out how much the academy has improved, but you also told us what needs to be better. For example, you said that that behaviour is usually good, but that some lessons are disrupted. We agree that there is room for improvement. Staff work hard to give you every opportunity to succeed, but some of you do not take enough responsibility, particularly if you are persistently absent or late, or do not work hard in lessons. We have specifically asked the academy to:

- raise standards in key subjects so that all your results are at least in line with national figures
- ensure that you all develop the personal skills, attitudes and independence that prepare you well for later life.

You have a key role because these improvements depend on you working to the best of your ability and taking responsibility for your own conduct and participation.

We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Her Majesty's Inspector

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