

The Priory Ruskin Academy

Rushcliffe Road, Grantham, NG31 8ED

Inspection dates

14–15 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- The academy's most recent examination results indicate that standards are not yet high enough. Some students do not make enough progress to make up for lost ground.
- Good teaching has not yet had time to result in good achievement that lags behind.
- Weaknesses – particularly in writing – limit the progress that some students make. Not all teachers do enough to support and improve students' skills in reading and writing.
- The developing new sixth form requires improvement. Although Year 13 students did well in 2012, there was worrying underperformance in Year 12 because some sixth-form teaching was not good enough.

The school has the following strengths

- The academy is very well led. The headmaster and deputy headmistress, well supported by The Academy Trust, have skilfully steered the academy's rapid improvement, often in the face of considerable difficulties.
- The academy's relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching is highly effective. Good teaching ensures that students make accelerated progress in the majority of their lessons. Standards are consequently rising strongly, from a low starting point.
- The academy enjoys a calm and purposeful climate for learning where mutual respect and high expectations are carefully nurtured.
- It is difficult to fault the students' exemplary conduct and positive attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is excellent.
- The transformation that has taken place in teaching, behaviour and leadership since the academy opened demonstrates its good capacity to sustain improvement and further raise standards.

Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice.
- Inspectors observed an assembly and 42 lessons, taught by 42 different teachers, one third of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- A range of documentation was analysed, including that relating to safeguarding, examination results, attendance, exclusions, behaviour, parental views, the academy’s self-evaluation and its systems for improving teaching and learning, and how the funding allocated for the pupil premium is spent.
- Inspectors were unable to take account of the online Parent View survey because there were insufficient entries, but they analysed parental responses collated by the academy.
- Inspectors took account of 43 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Discussions were held with the headmaster, nominated staff, the Chief Executive of The Priory Federation of Academies Trust and representatives of the governing body, and several groups of students.

Inspection team

Paul Brooker, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Alan Brewerton

Additional Inspector

Anne McAvan

Additional Inspector

Chris Fallon

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Priory Ruskin Academy is an average-sized secondary school that opened in September 2010 in the accommodation of its two predecessor schools.
- It operates across the two sites, two miles apart. The new school building is due for completion in February 2014.
- The academy is one of four sponsored by The Priory Federation of Academies Trust.
- A large majority of students are White British, and speak English as their first language; almost three quarters are boys.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is below the national figure.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well above average, and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above the national figure.
- A small sixth form opened in September 2010.
- The academy makes alternative provision, at Laughton Manor, for a small number of students in Years 9 to 11, alongside students from the other academies in the Priory Federation.
- The academy meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The academy's specialist subjects are in the visual arts and in sport and health.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that, by the end of Year 11, most students achieve or exceed the 'three levels' of progress expected so that standards at Key Stage 4 align with those found nationally, by:
 - ensuring that teaching is consistently good or outstanding
 - making sure that all teachers model high quality writing and take responsibility for improving students' literacy, particularly their reading and writing
 - checking that marking, assessment and target setting are effectively used to raise students' expectations and accelerate their improvement.
- Develop and sustain a good sixth form where students achieve well, by:
 - strengthening sixth-form teaching
 - ensuring that the courses are suitably matched to the needs and aspirations of the students
 - carefully guiding students' post-16 options and effectively supporting their academic progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils **requires improvement**

- Despite impressive improvements since the academy opened, inspectors judge that standards are still too low. Many students achieve or exceed the three levels of progress expected between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4, but pockets of underperformance persist. The most able mathematicians do not always secure the highest A* and A grades, and too few students make better than expected progress in English. Achievement in the sixth form also requires improvement.
- The academy's first Key Stage 4 results in 2011 exceeded its ambitious targets and were much better than the standards achieved by either of the predecessor schools. The impressive gains were largely sustained in year two, and standards continue to rise. Despite disappointing GCSE English results in 2012, there were notable improvements in key areas, such as humanities, which considerably boosted students' points scores.
- Good teaching is accelerating the progress that students make in lessons. Students of all abilities, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, make sound progress, including in English. However, the improvements in teaching have not had enough time to secure good achievement, particularly for students who start in Year 7 with low levels of prior attainment.
- The academy has shrewdly used early entry in mathematics to boost the B and C grades achieved by students in GCSE examinations, but has been rightly cautious not to enter students too soon in English or for the higher tier in mathematics.
- The academy is developing positive initiatives to encourage students to read regularly, and to enjoy their reading. The Renaissance Reading programme, with older students working as Reading Ambassadors, is a useful development that is well monitored, and the 'Rise and Read' initiative helpfully encourages and supports weaker readers in Year 7. However, reading is not well supported in all lessons or by all form tutors.
- Teachers of a range of subjects do not have common approaches or clear strategies to develop students' skills in writing. Although some marking corrects basic errors, too often this is not the case, and teachers themselves often neglect to model high quality writing.
- The academy's specialisms are a notable strength because students do particularly well in these subjects. They also make a good contribution to students' wider personal development by providing many opportunities for participation, enrichment and student leadership.
- Despite the fact that the small number of Year 13 students doing BTEC sport did very well in 2012, sixth form achievement is not good. Most sixth form students make the progress expected, often from low starting points. However, the academy recognises that results at AS level in 2012 were inadequate, and has taken suitable steps to redress this underperformance.

The quality of teaching **is good**

- Teaching in most subjects, including English and mathematics, is usually good and often outstanding. The overall quality of teaching is improving year on year, but is not outstanding because a few weaknesses remain. The academy knows where further improvements can be

made.

- One feature common to all lessons is the positive climate for learning. Teachers have consistently high expectations of students' behaviour, and work hard to maintain good relationships and nurture positive attitudes to learning. This enables all students to confidently participate in lessons.
- The best teachers ensure that students work hard by presenting tasks that immediately involve everyone in the class. When students are given the opportunity to work independently in pairs and small groups, they collaborate well to develop new skills and learning. This is immediately evident in lessons such as physical education (PE) and performing arts, but is also common in subjects such as history and science.
- There are common expectations in regard to teachers' lesson planning and marking, but the effectiveness of these varies. Some teachers are more ambitious in what they expect from their lessons and from homework, particularly for the most able students. This variability is reflected in the quality of teachers' questioning: in the best lessons, the questions are open and probing, and teachers have clever strategies (like passing the bean bag) to keep everyone involved.
- Teachers know their students' capabilities and how well they are doing, but the effectiveness of their target setting and marking varies. The most effective teachers use the students' target grades to set ever-higher goals, and use marking comments to carefully steer improvement. Too often, however, this is not the case, particularly when teachers neglect to check that students respond to the guidance given.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour is excellent, and was consistently good or better in all lessons observed during the inspection. Despite the challenges of the overcrowded Manthorpe site, students behave with remarkable politeness, maturity and consideration. Students of all ages get on well together.
 - Students respond positively to the academy's high expectations, particularly with regard to their appearance and conduct. They wear their uniform with pride and look after their environment, so that the sites are litter-free. Parents and carers are particularly pleased about the standard of behaviour at the academy.
 - Students have exemplary attitudes to learning. Although there are no bells, they are punctual to lessons, settle quickly and are keen to volunteer answers. They enjoy working together, and their readiness to support one another is a strong feature of lessons. Students are confident when asked to take responsibility, for example in organising a group task in history or leading a dynamic warm-up in PE.
 - Students say that incidents of bullying are very rare. They are confident that if they have any concerns, these will be taken seriously and handled appropriately. Students of all ages are alert to different types of bullying, including the dangers of cyber-bullying and the way that derogatory language can cause offence or upset, so they are sensitive to, and show respect for, one another.
 - The academy has a well-structured house system, based around vertical tutor groups, and good procedures to support students who struggle to conform to its expectations. Consequently, there are few incidents of unacceptable behaviour, persistent absenteeism is reducing and the number
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of fixed term exclusions has plummeted.

- The academy makes alternative provision at Laughton Manor for students who might otherwise not attend school and those at risk of permanent exclusion. The significant improvements in students' attitudes, participation and enjoyment reflect the success of this provision. Moreover, all students achieved some form of accreditation in 2012, and several were successfully re-integrated into Key Stage 4, or went on to post-16 courses.
- Students, including those attending Laughton Manor, say that they feel safe and, for the most part, enjoy coming to school. The improvements in attendance since the academy opened reflect students' positive attitudes and engagement.

The leadership and management are good

- The headmaster's high expectations have successfully established a very positive climate for learning and enabled the academy to make rapid improvements in its first two years. Visitors feel welcome and are immediately struck by the calm confidence of students and staff.
- Parents and students say that the academy has been transformed, but senior leaders recognise that it is still on a 'journey of improvement'. Key appointments at middle leadership are beginning to accelerate the rise in standards, for example in humanities and, most recently, in modern foreign languages where there has been a history of underperformance.
- Since the academy opened, improvements have been based on an unrelenting focus on strengthening teaching and learning. Senior and middle leaders regularly check the quality of teaching by observing lessons, looking closely at students' progress data, looking at books and surveying students' views. The academy assesses the performance of individual staff and takes a suitably tough stance where there is underperformance, including restricting pay scale progression.
- The academy has an impressive programme of continuing professional development for staff. Specific support is planned for individual teachers who need it, and training is prioritised on the basis of whole-school and departmental reviews. Best practice is identified and shared with all staff, for example with videoed sessions shown in staff briefings.
- Setting up the sixth form in 2010 has been a significant challenge, and students have achieved very mixed results. The sixth form has been an additional burden on the academy's resources and energy, and senior leaders recognise that its provision needs to be better adapted to meet the needs of the students who choose to stay at their academy.
- The curriculum is well adapted to meet the needs of different students. Those who need additional support and guidance are given necessary help. Alternative provision at Laughton, for example, offers rather unusual options in stable management and horticulture, which students enjoy. The foundation curriculum sensibly provides additional literacy and numeracy for targeted students in Years 7 and 8.
- The academy actively uses its sport and health specialism to promote students' personal development and well-being. For example, students are encouraged to take on leadership roles as sports ambassadors, and the 'health passport' encourages all students to participate in extra-curricular activities and helps the academy to tailor its wide range of enrichment opportunities to suit everyone.

- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strong feature of the academy. Students develop personal qualities that prepare them well for adult life and are encouraged to be reflective and considerate of the needs of others. For example, students are actively involved in initiatives such as the Grantham Food Bank, providing emergency help to local people in crisis.
 - The academy is able to draw on the experience, expertise and central resources of The Priory Federation, but has also made good use of local authority consultants, for example during the recent whole-school review of teaching.
 - The pupil premium (additional government funding) has been sensibly allocated to secure equal participation for all students, for example by subsidising the Year 7 residential trips, and to provide additional teaching assistant support for those at risk of underachievement. The successful allocation of these resources is reflected in the positive GCSE results achieved by students known to be eligible for free school meals.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The Priory Federation of Academies Trust, which forms the overarching governing body, is strong and effective. The trustees steer the development of the academy very well, and use their centralised resources effectively to support its day-to-day management, for example with staffing and finance. Responsibility for day-to-day running of the academy rests with the local governing body, with its own Chair. Senior leaders ensure that governors are well informed about the academy's provision and its management of performance. Governors are encouraged to make regular visits and the 'scorecard' summarises clearly the students' academic achievement. The detailed information provided by the academy enables governors to ask the right questions and support the academy, for example by sanctioning decisions about pay progression for staff. Governors have a clear overview of the way that the academy uses its resources, including student premium funding. However, the local governing body does not ask searching questions because it does not have a clear enough grasp of standards or the reasons for underperformance, so does not challenge senior leaders in this respect.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its students' needs. This ensures that students are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its students' needs. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136194
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	399795

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	1012
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	June Kirton
Headteacher	Clive Shepherd
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01476 566384
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