

Portslade Aldridge Community Academy

Chalky Road, Brighton, BN41 2WS

Inspection dates 6–7 December 2012

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Teaching was not good enough in the first year of the academy, so students did less well than they should have done in their GCSE examinations, especially in mathematics.
- Students make very different progress in different subjects, because subject leaders are not equally good at making sure everyone does the best they can.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students achieve better on some courses than on others, often because they have not been guided to make choices best suited to their abilities.
- Some staff struggle to manage the behaviour of the most challenging students.
- Gaps in achievement between different groups of students are too wide.
- The Principal and senior leaders did not do enough to make sure that teaching and achievement were good in the academy's first year.

The school has the following strengths

- Governors have a clear and accurate view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and are acting quickly in partnership with the Principal and senior leaders to make it improve faster.
- The academy's use of assessment information to track progress and stop anyone falling behind is now a strength.
- Teaching and leadership in mathematics have improved significantly, so that students are making much better progress in lessons.
- Most students make at least the expected progress from their starting points in English.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 35 lessons, five jointly with senior staff. They also made short visits to classrooms, sometimes accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team, focusing on the quality of marking, on behaviour, and on the quality of teaching in mathematics.
- Inspectors held meetings with staff, students and representatives of the governing body and the academy sponsor. They also held telephone discussions with leaders of college courses attended by Year 10 and 11 students.
- The inspection team scrutinised academy documentation, including self-evaluation, improvement planning and policies.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents and carers who had responded to academy surveys, as well as of the eight parents and carers who had responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) by the end of the inspection.
- Inspectors also took account of the views of 25 staff who returned inspection questionnaires.

Inspection team

Christine Raeside, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Stephanie Matthews	Additional Inspector
Heather Ward	Additional Inspector
David Webster	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Portslade Aldridge Community Academy is smaller than the average secondary school.
- The intake is predominantly White British; about 10% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- About one third of students are eligible to be supported by the pupil premium funding. This is additional money provided to schools by the government for students known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority, or are children of families in the armed services.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is just below average and the proportion at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is about double the average, at 16%.
- A group of 17 students in Years 10 and 11 attend courses at City College, Brighton, and a very small number attend Plumpton College, which offers land-based courses such as agriculture.
- The academy meets the government floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The academy is currently undergoing major building and refurbishment works, which will bring the sixth form, currently situated in a separate building, onto the main academy site in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that all students make better progress, especially in mathematics, GCSE results improve and gaps in achievement between different groups of students close.
- Make sure that teaching is typically good in all subjects and that more is outstanding, by checking that all teachers:
 - plan and teach different activities for students at different starting points, so that they can all move to the next stage of understanding within a lesson
 - make the right judgement about when students are ready and have the skills to work independently or in groups without learning slowing down
 - improve the quality of their marking to match the best in the academy and give students time to think about and respond to advice so that their work improves
 - have the skills and confidence to manage students with challenging behaviour so that lessons are not disrupted or learning held back.
- Make sure that all senior and middle leaders drive improvement in their areas of responsibility equally well, can show evidence of how they are improving students' achievement, attendance or behaviour, and know what more needs to be done.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Attainment is well below the national average. In the academy's first year, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grade C or higher, including English and mathematics, was 39%, narrowly missing the government floor target for attainment of 40%.
- GCSE results in mathematics were poor. This was because most students made much less progress throughout their time at secondary school than they should have done. In contrast, most students made at least the expected progress in English.
- Learning and progress in lessons are improving and are often good. In a few lessons, achievement is outstanding because teachers have thought of creative ways of approaching the subject and because they challenge all students, all through the lesson, to think and work hard.
- In mathematics, achievement is improving because the department is now better led and managed. Students are very positive about the changes, reporting that they are now making better progress and understand how to improve their work.
- The new head of mathematics plans to enter all students for GCSE early, with a second sitting to improve grades. Academy leaders are convinced that early entry will improve students' chances of success, especially because Year 11 students have been consulted and are motivated by this approach.
- The progress made by disabled students and those with special educational needs is mixed. In 2012, it was above expectations for those who need extra help in lessons and exceptionally good for students with a statement of special educational needs. However, it was well below expectations for those who have support both in lessons and with other needs, such as challenging behaviour.
- Students eligible for support through the pupil premium achieved an average points score of 304.2, lower than other students at the academy. However, the progress of this group is improving and, in some cases, is better than that of other students.
- Boys did less well than girls in 2012, but the gap in favour of girls is not a general trend; boys' and girls' achievement varies in different year groups. The achievement of students who belong to minority ethnic groups is closely monitored. This shows variation by individual, with no trends of underachievement emerging.
- Achievement in the sixth form is mixed, with better progress made by students on AS-level courses than on A-level courses.
- All students who attended college courses in 2012 passed. In some cases, they exceeded their targets. They made good progress because the courses were well chosen to match their learning needs.
- The academy's progress tracking information shows that students are doing better year on year, with the best progress currently in Year 7. Lesson observations support this.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is improving. However, it has not been good enough for long enough to close gaps in performance between different groups or to result in good achievement.
- In the best lessons, learning moves on briskly. Activities are tightly timed and work is set at different levels, so that all students can make good progress from their starting points. Tasks are demanding. Year 11 students in an English lesson rose to the difficult challenge of writing their own examination questions and mark schemes, giving them a much better understanding of the standard of work needed for a top grade.
- In Year 7 mathematics lessons, students were eager to learn. They could explain their individual strengths and weaknesses and how they would improve their levels. In one lesson, they excitedly tried to predict the outcome of a probability experiment, giving a general groan when

the bell rang.

- Where teaching still requires improvement, it is sometimes because the same work is set for all students, whatever their ability, so progress slows. Although lessons are often well planned to include discussion and explanation, there are times when students are not ready or able to work sensibly in groups, and learning and behaviour deteriorate. Some teachers need support to manage challenging behaviour.
- The quality of marking is variable, although with some very good practice. The use of 'dialogue marking' in mathematics helps students respond to their teachers' comments and make better progress as a result. Elsewhere, marking is regular, but students are not given the opportunity to respond to it and so improve their next piece of work.
- The academy places great importance on its 'core values' and on the development of basic literacy skills. Students can talk about how, as well as what, they are learning. Lessons in 'learning to learn' are helping them to do this. They enjoy explaining, for example, which 'learning muscles' they are using. These might include 'creativity' or 'teamwork'. They are expected to apply their skills across subjects, for example in physical education, where the teacher insisted on explanations about rugby tackles in full sentences and clear and appropriate English.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Attitudes to learning are generally positive and students report that this has improved significantly since the academy opened. However, there are still a few instances of disruption to learning.
- Around the academy, students are polite, friendly and welcoming. They are also at times too boisterous or over-exuberant, not helped by reduced space during the building works.
- Students feel very safe at the academy and parent surveys support this view. They particularly appreciate the high profile campaign to prevent bullying, 'Cut It Out', which has reduced bullying incidents. They are rightly confident that academy leaders will act decisively to deal with any issues that arise.
- Students are well informed about different types of bullying, such as racist and homophobic, which are not tolerated. They are well informed about personal safety, including internet safety.
- They understand and like the 'P and C', praise and consequences, system of rewards and sanctions. Most teachers use behaviour consequences well. The 'behaviour watch' system helps senior teachers to keep an eye on any trends of poor behaviour in classrooms.
- Training for teachers in how to spot the signs of disruptive behaviour and stop it escalating has been effective. As a result, there are far fewer 'call outs' of senior teachers to deal with disruptive students than in the past.
- Overall attendance was just below average for the academy's first year. Persistent absence is falling. However, monitoring of this area is not tight enough. Senior leaders cannot say with certainty if attendance this year is rising for all groups of students because they have not fully collected and analysed this information.
- Students on college courses attend well and there are good systems for the academy and alternative providers to monitor this. Enrolment on a college course has helped some students improve their previously low attendance and remove any risk of being excluded.
- Social and moral aspects of learning are emphasised throughout the academy, for example in the work of peer mediators, trained to help resolve friendship issues and prevent bullying. Students have a strong awareness of their responsibility to one another and of the consequences of negative actions, reinforced by the successful 'P and C' system.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The Principal and senior leaders have accurately evaluated the academy's performance as requiring further improvement. They acknowledge that achievement is not yet good enough and have taken decisive steps to improve teaching and to make sure that students are making better progress
- Subject choices are improving. Students are now guided towards programmes that are appropriate to their needs, both at GCSE and in the sixth form, so that there are fewer failing because they are on unsuitable courses.
- Student assessment information given to teachers to help them plan lessons is detailed. It holds them to account for the impact of their teaching by providing a running analysis of how much progress individuals and groups of students are making.
- Students' progress information is used to plan extra support sessions, which are highly valued by students. Pupil premium funding has been used appropriately to help pay for this intervention.
- Not all information collected by the academy is used well enough to bring about improvement. This is because some senior and middle leaders are less good than others at rigorously evaluating actions taken or planning next steps.
- The Principal is firmly committed to the belief that 'only good is good enough'. He has made good use of external consultants to sharpen the senior team's view of the quality of teaching. A lesson that is less than good triggers support and challenge. If teachers do not improve or fail to meet their targets, they do not receive pay awards.
- The academy meets the statutory requirements for safeguarding students. Staff are well trained in recognising signs of abuse or neglect and there are good links with local services where there is a need for additional support.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body and the sponsor bring significant experience and expertise to the academy. They hold the Principal firmly to account for its performance. They were not satisfied with its first set of examination results and acted swiftly to put plans for rapid improvement in place, which they monitor closely. They have a firm grasp of achievement information, as well as a clear view of the quality of teaching and of which teachers are meeting their targets for good teaching and achievement. They have added an experienced headteacher to the senior team to support improvement. This appointment has sharpened evaluation of the academy's performance. They have managed the academy through difficult financial challenges, including the building and refurbishment programme. They monitor closely the spending of any additional funds, such as pupil premium funding, to make sure it is properly focused on achievement.
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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 pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils 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 pupils' needs. Pupils 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 pupils 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	137063
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	399854

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Community
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	783
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	116
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Honor Wilson-Fletcher
Principal	Stuart McLaughlin
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01273 416300
Fax number	01273 422129
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