

Discovery Academy

Discovery South, Longton, Stoke on Trent, ST3 2NA

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2013

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

- Students' achievement requires improvement. The progress made by some students is not rapid enough, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The proportion of good teaching is not high enough to enable all students to make or exceed expected progress. In some lessons the work provided is not matched well to students' abilities and this impedes their progress. On a very few occasions teaching is inadequate and results in very limited progress or negative attitudes and behaviour of students.
- Teachers do not always set work that is appropriately demanding for more-able students, or ensure that valuable skills for independent learning are promoted to all students in lessons.
- Despite the academy's rigorous systems to promote good behaviour and ensure that students feel safe and attend regularly, there are elements that require improvement. Students are not always self-motivated or actively involved in their learning, which can limit their personal and academic progress.
- Although leaders monitor the work of the academy thoroughly and regularly, the information is not always used effectively enough to link action planning with evidence of its impact on students' achievements.

The school has the following strengths

- All students are equally valued and included in what the academy has to offer. There is a clear determination that outcomes will improve because all students deserve the best possible education and chances in life.
- There are excellent levels of care, support and monitoring for those students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.
- Leaders and the governing body have brought the academy through a period of turbulence and staff turnover with minimum disruption so that the pace of improvement is now increasing.
- The academy's capacity to improve is enhanced by the commitment and professionalism of staff, who are eager and willing to improve their practice through constructive feedback and relevant training.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons across both the academy’s north and south sites, of which two were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with leaders, teachers and four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors who represents the academy’s sponsor.
- Discussions were held with a large number of small groups of students on both of the academy’s sites, gathering the views of over 80 students in this process.
- Inspectors took account of 13 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection.
- The inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at a number of policies and other documents, including the academy’s own data on current students’ progress, its self-evaluation, planning and monitoring information, records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents related to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Marguerite Murphy, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Ariane Roberts	Additional Inspector
Peter McKay	Additional Inspector
Ramesh Kapadia	Additional Inspector
Mary Liptrot	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is larger than average. It is sponsored by Stoke-on-Trent College and opened on two sites in September 2011 following the merger of two predecessor secondary schools. It is due to move into its new, purpose-built accommodation in September 2013.
- Over 80% of students are from White British backgrounds, and over 10% are of Pakistani heritage. A small number of students represent a range of other minority ethnic groups. There is an average proportion of students whose first language is not English, and very few are in the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, at 47%, is almost double that of the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding based on the number of students in local authority care, from service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- A well above average proportion of students has additional needs that are supported through school action, school action plus, or a statement of special educational needs.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum standards expected for attainment and progress.
- The academy uses Reach, a pupil referral service offering alternative provision for some students. In addition, a number of students in Key Stage 4 access alternative courses at Stoke-on-Trent College.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of students' learning and rates of progress across all subjects, with a particular focus on English and mathematics, in order to raise standards and close the gap with national averages.
- To achieve this, improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better by:
 - eliminating inadequate teaching
 - improving teachers' use of information about students' attainment to plan lessons that meet the specific needs of all ability groups with appropriately matched tasks and activities that enable them to make more rapid progress
 - ensuring that all groups of students, particularly the more-able, are consistently set work that is appropriately demanding and leads to higher standards
 - ensuring all teachers use probing questioning to develop and extend students' knowledge and skills, check their understanding and, where necessary, reshape their learning
 - giving pupils of all abilities the skills and scope to work independently, express their own ideas and discover solutions for themselves
 - improving the quality and consistency of teachers' marking so that it guides students more effectively in what they need to do to improve their work.
- Ensure that the continuing improvements in students' behaviour and safety extend to have a more positive impact in the classroom, for example by promoting students' self-motivation to participate and become more fully engaged in their learning.

- Further develop the effectiveness of leaders by:
 - sharpening their skills in checking that the academy’s action plans always have clear and concise success criteria, related to improving outcomes for students, against which their impact can be measured.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- From standards that are often low on entry to the academy, students' overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 remains well below the national average. For a small minority of students this represents good progress from their starting points, for example those with a statement of special educational needs and some students supported at school action plus.
- However, a number of students supported at school action and those in some lower ability groups make less progress than they could, and very few students achieve the highest grades at GCSE. Teaching is not always effective enough to provide the right levels of difficulty, support and high expectations to enable all students to achieve more.
- The academy's first examination results in 2012 showed little or no difference between the progress made by all groups of students. For example, students of White British or Pakistani backgrounds made the same rates of progress.
- The difference in progress and standards of English and mathematics between students who were or were not eligible for pupil premium funding is less than that found nationally. The funding is spent well on additional tuition, revision sessions and literacy interventions. For some students it provides valuable financial support for uniform and travel passes, for example to access college courses.
- Students perform strongly in vocational subjects with a majority making better than expected progress in BTEC subjects such as sport and business studies.
- The academy uses early entry to GCSE examinations in mathematics and the majority of students resit these until they reach their target grade. Despite this, the proportion achieving grade C or above in 2012 was well below the national average, although measures put in place to improve this are beginning to have a positive impact on the grades predicted for 2013.
- There is a clear commitment to developing students' literacy skills, as a high proportion enters with reading ages that are well below their chronological age and this reduces their enjoyment or willingness to read. Although it is too soon to see the full impact of this on improving standards, there are early signs of success in the accelerated progress being made by some students.
- Students attending alternative provision achieve well in their personalised targets, for example in overcoming difficult circumstances, behaviour or willingness to engage in traditional forms of learning. Robust systems are in place by which the academy quality assures this provision to ensure that it remains the most suitable placement for those students.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Not enough teaching is consistently good or better, although it is improving steadily and there are examples of outstanding teaching.
- Good relationships between adults and students contribute to the positive atmosphere in most lessons and around the academy. In the more effective lessons, teachers capitalise on this and have high expectations of what the students are capable of achieving, so that students respond to these and make better progress.
- Teachers do not always take into account the students' current skills and build progressively from that point. As a result, in some lessons lower-ability students with weak reading or basic mathematical knowledge have gaps in their learning that limit their progress. Rather than working on those gaps, teachers push on with topics in the schemes of work at a level that is too difficult for some students. Similarly, more-able students are not always stretched to ensure that they work at an appropriately higher level.
- In the best lessons teachers provide opportunities for students to work independently or in groups, encouraging the development of self-help skills and using probing questions to extend their understanding. A Year 7 English class recreated the busy working environment of a

newsroom as students used their different independent learning packs to create newspaper articles in the 'horrible history' style. Students in a Year 11 sociology lesson were motivated well to make excellent progress in devising revision notes and techniques to improve their learning and share these with each other.

- In a Year 8 Discovery lesson, students were challenged to solve real-life problems and questions, such as how many people would be living on the earth by the year 2050. The teacher's skilful questioning kept students engaged and enthusiastic about their learning so that they made excellent progress in aspects of geographical and numerical understanding.
- As all lessons do not provide a similar level of well-planned tasks, active and independent learning and high expectations, students do not make good or outstanding progress overall. Teachers' marking and other feedback to students is inconsistent in quality and usefulness. Students do not routinely know how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Students say they feel safe and they demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, they have very good knowledge of issues around Internet safety and of different forms of bullying. The academy works hard to improve behaviour and attendance and there are clear procedures in place to monitor and support students who have difficulties in these areas.
- In the vast majority of lessons and around the academy students' behaviour is good. A few students say they can feel reluctant to report occasional issues that may concern them, such as the tensions that still seem to exist between some students on the two sites. However, they agree that any incidents that are brought to the attention of staff are quickly dealt with. Students can report issues anonymously on the academy's safety website.
- Responses from the small number of parents who completed the on-line survey indicate mixed views of whether the academy deals effectively with bullying, although no specific concerns were raised.
- Effective partnerships with parents and external support agencies help to ensure that good care and support is given to students who need it, including those who attend alternative placements or are children in the care of the local authority. The academy is recognised locally as having a high level of commitment to equalities and inclusion, in which all students have a right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- The academy has been successful in reducing considerably the number of negative behaviour reports, fixed-term exclusions and the proportion of students who are persistently absent. It has also implemented successful measures to eliminate bullying related to economic disadvantage, for example in restaurant services for students eligible for free school meals.
- The academy's behaviour management systems are clear and understood. Leaders have identified that some inconsistencies exist in the way staff manage students' behaviour to ensure that it makes a positive contribution to their learning.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Following the resignation of the previous principal, the governing body acted quickly and sought the support of local expertise through its partnership with the Leek federation of schools. Governors secured the services of the acting principal, who has successfully galvanised the staff and gained their confidence.
- Supported by other senior leaders, the acting principal has reviewed key processes and policies, making them more accessible and manageable, recognising that there is more work to do on this. A significant amount of information is collected about the performance of cohorts and

groups of students. Leaders need to refine the way this is used to ensure that it is used more effectively by teachers in the planning and delivery of lessons to accelerate students' progress.

- Self-evaluation is honest and accurate. The academy is well aware of the journey it is on and the potential obstacles to be overcome in order to raise standards and students' achievement. It is now in a good position to meet those challenges.
 - Leaders monitor the work of teachers regularly and take action to improve teaching through coaching, mentoring and professional development opportunities. Considerable staffing turnover in the last year or so has limited the impact of this work and the speed of improvement to some extent, but the academy's capacity to improve is now stronger.
 - Staff are self-reflective and respond positively to the increased opportunities for professional development and sharing good practice. Some subject leaders are relatively new to their roles and responsibilities but are developing well with the advice and support of senior leaders and colleagues from schools in the local partnership, including a National Leader in Education.
 - The range of courses and subjects offered is personalised to meet students' needs and help to prepare them well for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Good partnerships with local colleges contribute well to the options available. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively, for example in 'Discovery Challenge' time.
 - Safeguarding policies and procedures are robust and meet statutory requirements.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body makes an effective contribution to the academy's leadership and management and is fully aware of its strengths and weaknesses. Governors are well informed and have a good level of skill and knowledge. Difficult decisions are not shied away from and underperformance is tackled. The progress of the academy's new building is being overseen by the governing body to enable senior leaders to get on with the key task of improving teaching and learning and raising achievement. Performance management systems are used to set appropriate targets for leaders and teachers and these are being reviewed in preparation for the start of the next academic year. Due to circumstances such as staffing reductions and some recruitment of new staff in the last 18 months, there is not always a close correlation between the quality of teachers' work and their arrangements for pay.
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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	136681
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	399872

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,340
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sarah Robinson
Acting Principal	Ian Hamilton
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01782 233933
Fax number	01782 233926
Email address	academy@thediscoveryacademy.co.uk

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