

University Academy Holbeach

Park Road, Holbeach, Spalding, PE12 7PU

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leadership, including from the governing body, is strong and effective. The Principal's infectious commitment and passion galvanise staff and effectively drive improvement.
- Despite the challenges of amalgamating two schools, the development of the new academy has been very well managed, often under challenging circumstances.
- Students make good progress across all year groups and in most subjects, often from low starting points. Achievement in mathematics and in vocational subjects is particularly strong.
- Students benefit from teaching that is usually good and sometimes outstanding. High quality teaching promotes good achievement and very positive attitudes to learning.
- The students' good behaviour helps to create a calm and friendly climate. Students get on well together and bullying is rare.
- The sixth form is good. Sixth form students achieve well, and exceptionally well in the applied subjects.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The academy is only in its second year of operation, and aspects of its work require further embedding and strengthening, for example in regard to further reducing persistent absenteeism.
- Standards are rising, but headline figures remain below the national figures at Key Stage 4.
- Teaching is good, but best practice needs to be more widely developed to secure greater consistency, particularly in promoting students' literacy skills and their wider enrichment and development.

Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice.
- Inspectors observed two assemblies and 51 lessons, taught by 47 different teachers, some of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- A range of documentation was analysed, including that relating to safeguarding, student progress, attendance, exclusions, behaviour logs, the academy’s self-evaluation and its systems for improving teaching and learning.
- Inspectors took account of the online Parent View survey, for which there were 19 returns. They also analysed parental responses gathered by the academy.
- Inspectors took account of 60 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Discussions were held with the Principal, nominated staff, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and several groups of students.

Inspection team

Paul Brooker, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Alan Brewerton	Additional Inspector
John Greevy	Additional Inspector
Patrick Cook	Additional Inspector
Thelma McIntosh-Clark	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The University Academy Holbeach is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- It opened in September 2011 in the accommodation of its two predecessor schools and continues to operate across the two sites at Holbeach and Crowland, which are 15 miles apart. The new school building at Holbeach is due for completion in the autumn term 2013.
- A large majority of students are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (the additional funding provided by the government to support students, including those eligible for free school meals) is broadly average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is above the national figure, as are the proportions supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- There are currently no students attending alternative provision (education provided by other schools or colleges).
- The academy makes early GCSE entries in mathematics only.
- The academy meets government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The academy is sponsored by The University of Lincoln and specialises in technology, science and applied subjects.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise student attainment by the end of Key Stage 4, so that by 2013 it equals or exceeds national figures on all key indicators, by:
 - increasing the proportion of good and outstanding teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3
 - continuing to improve attendance and further reducing levels of persistent absenteeism.
- Ensure that best practice is spread effectively in the drive for continuous improvement so that teachers consistently:
 - set challenging outcomes for the more-able students
 - support students' literacy by planning opportunities for speaking and reading and by promoting high quality extended writing
 - enrich students' cultural understanding and awareness, and provide opportunities for reflection.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well across the curriculum and at each key stage. Unexpectedly low results in English in 2012 dented the academy's GCSE headline figures, but performance across other subjects was impressive.
- Inspection evidence confirms that students of all abilities make good progress in reading and writing, and standards in English are rising. The quality of learning seen in the nine English lessons observed was consistently good or better. Literacy is well supported in these lessons and also in some other subjects, such as geography. However, teachers do not always do enough to develop students' skills in speaking, reading and extended writing.
- Students with lower starting points make particularly good progress, as do disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Students known to be eligible for free school meals also achieve well and are beginning to close the gap in attainment.
- The academy recognises that standards need to increase, and the high quality teaching in Key Stage 3 is already raising expectations about what each successive year group will achieve. The academy makes very good use of its data tracking system to support and accelerate student performance. For example, careful analysis of progress in mathematics has enabled the academy to use early GCSE entry to secure the highest possible grades for students.
- Sixth form students make excellent progress in the vocational subjects, although it is too early to judge whether the newly introduced academic subjects will be equally successful. The academy's specialist subjects are a notable strength because they not only enable students to achieve well, but also provide clear pathways into employment and training for a large number of students, many of whom had low starting points.

The quality of teaching is good

- Lessons are characterised by good relationships and a positive climate for learning. Teaching is good because careful planning and skilful management ensure that most lessons are sharply focused and well-paced. Teachers work hard to nurture students' positive attitudes and good work habits.
- Teachers know the students' capabilities and potential well because they have plenty of assessment information available. Marking is a notable strength because teachers regularly provide detailed and helpful feedback for students. Teachers also make good use of questioning to check students' understanding and guide their improvement.
- The quality of provision has strengthened since the academy opened. Weaknesses have been identified and addressed, and a large majority of lessons are good or better. However, some lessons require improvement, particularly when the planned activities are not hard enough for the more-able students. In a few lessons students spend too long completing undemanding tasks, or they simply sit and listen for too long.
- In the best lessons, the quality of learning is excellent because every student is involved from start to finish. This is most evident in the applied subjects where tasks are challenging and the

quality of instruction and modelling by teachers is often exemplary. Outstanding teaching was observed in a wide range of subjects, including mathematics, English, joinery, hair and beauty, and electrical maintenance.

- The outstanding teaching sets ambitious learning outcomes but also supports the development of students' wider skills, for example in literacy. Students take care to write accurately when teachers emphasise its importance and provide clear guidance.
- The academy targets additional teaching support very effectively. Teaching assistants are well deployed, booster sessions are provided after school and specific support for younger students with weak literacy is very well delivered through the Freshstart programme. Older students who have recently transferred from Crowland to the Holbeach campus recognise that lessons are more demanding and say that they really appreciate the additional support they receive.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students respond to the academy's high expectations and conduct themselves very well. The academy has successfully created a friendly but purposeful environment at each site so that students feel safe and well supported. Even though the Holbeach accommodation is bursting at the seams, students' polite and considerate behaviour maintains a calm and orderly air.
- Behaviour was consistently good in all lessons observed during the inspection, and staff and students say that this is typical. Students have good work habits: they settle quickly and follow instructions so that lessons start promptly and without disruption; they listen patiently, even when the teacher occasionally talks for too long; and are confident to volunteer answers and offer opinions. Most take a pride in their work, although some need to try harder to present and complete their work properly.
- The students' attitudes to learning are most impressive when they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. This is immediately evident in the vocational learning sessions in the sixth form where students are motivated to work independently and seek advice when they need it.
- Students say that bullying is very rare. The academy is careful to record minor bullying incidents, even if these are 'one-off' occurrences, so that bullying is seen to be taken seriously and does not escalate. Students are confident to report concerns, safe in the knowledge that they will be suitably resolved. Students of all ages are alert to different types of bullying, including the use of derogatory language and cyber-bullying.
- Students develop personal qualities that prepare them well for the next stage of their education and later life. Most are punctual and attend well. Attendance is now approaching the national average, but despite steady improvements, levels of persistent absenteeism remain stubbornly above the national figure.

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal leads by example and works tirelessly to drive improvement and secure the best results and the widest opportunity for every student. His boundless energy has a galvanising effect on staff and students. The complementary skills of other senior leaders help to steer the academy's development and ensure its smooth day-to-day management at both sites.

Leadership in the sixth form is excellent.

- The academy has faced significant challenges since it opened, particularly in restructuring staffing and managing the transition to one site alongside the building programme. Staff morale has consequently, at times, been fragile. However, senior and middle leaders have focused relentlessly on driving improvement and raising standards. Senior leaders, including governors, recognise that the academy is still 'on a journey', but share the same high aspirations for the academy.
- Despite the upheavals of the last 18 months, particularly for students based at Crowland, parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the academy's provision. Some responses on Parent View highlighted parental concerns about homework and the extent to which the academy responds to the views of parents and carers. However, students who have transferred to the Holbeach campus say that they have really benefited from the move.
- Senior and middle leaders focus continuously on strengthening teaching and learning. The academy has a clear system of staff appraisal that is underpinned by regular checks on teachers' classroom performance and the quality of their marking, as well as students' work and behaviour and, ultimately, the examination outcomes. Around 40% of teachers are on the upper pay scale, but their salary progression is tied to successful achievement of key performance indicators.
- The curriculum is a notable strength because it is carefully tailored so that students have equal access to a wide range of different courses to suit their different needs and aspirations. The impressive post-16 vocational options, mostly linked with the academy's specialist subjects, are well established and exceptionally well resourced. A range of academic subjects has been sensibly introduced so that students have a suitable balance of academic and work-related courses that provide different routes into higher education, training and employment.
- The mainstream curriculum is well adapted so that pupils who need additional support and guidance are given the help they need. The Year 7 Freshstart course, for example, successfully provides additional literacy for students who need it, and after-school sessions are timetabled to boost Year 11 students' performance in key subjects.
- The academy effectively promotes the students' moral and social development by modelling positive interactions, and through the curriculum and its extra-curricular enrichment, such as sports leadership and Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Opportunities for spiritual and cultural development feature less strongly in everyday life, although when given the opportunity students are reflective and inquisitive about different beliefs, values and cultures.
- The additional government funding provided through the pupil premium has been carefully targeted to enhance support and guidance for students and ensure that all have equal access to extra-curricular programmes and enrichment opportunities. For example, intervention sessions and learning mentors are funded from the pupil premium budget, and additional after-school transport to Crowland is subsidised so that students can participate in all available activities. The good achievement by students known to be eligible for free school meals demonstrates that these resources are well used.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The Academy Trust balances well the need for support and challenge. During this difficult transition period the governing body has provided clear strategic leadership and considerable material support, for example in overseeing the building project and resourcing additional accommodation. Governors entrust senior leaders, but have good systems for holding them to account and seeking clear justification for new proposals. The governing body, well led by the

experienced Chair and Vice Chair, are well informed about the academy's performance, the quality of teaching and how the performance of staff is managed. The impact of the pupil premium funding is monitored and safeguarding arrangements are robust.

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	137282
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	399877

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1214
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	259
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Penney
Principal	Steve Baragwanath
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01406 423042
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