

# St Ursula's E-ACT Academy

Brecon Road, Bristol, BS9 4DT

## Inspection dates

16–17 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
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

- Pupils' attainment in mathematics is not always high enough and their progress in the subject is too variable.
- Teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that pupils make good progress across all of their subjects.
- Teachers do not always plan work which offers all pupils in their classes the right level of challenge. Nor are teachers always quick enough to adapt their lessons when some pupils are finding the work too hard and others find it too easy.
- In a rapidly growing academy, too much of the weight of leadership and management is resting solely on the shoulders of the principal and vice-principal. There are no middle leaders to help drive improvement in areas identified as underperforming.
- The governing body has not taken urgent enough action in establishing the systems and processes needed to find out about the quality of education provided, and to ensure that effective actions are taken to improve provision.

### The school has the following strengths

- The academy gives a high priority to the development of pupils' literacy skills, and pupils make good progress in English.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the links between sounds and letters (phonics) to help them read. From an early age they are encouraged to write at every opportunity. Many pupils are clear and confident in speaking to large groups.
- The academy has a strong ethos for encouraging pupils to be good citizens. Pupils work very constructively together. They take on a wide range of responsibilities for supporting their fellow pupils and for ensuring the smooth running of the academy.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and behave well. Their attendance has risen over the last year, and rates of persistent absence are very low.
- Children's attainment at the end of the Reception Year is high.
- The academy is highly regarded by parents, who particularly value that teachers are approachable and keep parents informed about their children's progress.
- The academy has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Senior leaders have been active in monitoring the quality of teaching and giving staff clear feedback on how to improve.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed ten teachers in 14 lessons, and made shorter visits to other lessons and activities. Three lessons were observed jointly with the vice-principal.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils, with the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body and with school staff. Informal discussions also took place with staff, pupils and parents.
- Questionnaire returns from 19 staff were analysed.
- Inspectors took account of 52 responses to the on-line Parent View questionnaire in planning the inspection. Evidence from the school's own survey of parents was also examined.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans, its safeguarding policies, and minutes of meetings of the governing body.

## Inspection team

Ian Hodgkinson, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Voaden

Additional Inspector

Gail Robertson

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- St Ursula's became a primary academy following recent turbulence in the school's long history.
- Originally a girls' boarding school run by a religious order, it became an all-through mixed independent school which closed for financial reasons in 2010. The city council purchased the land and buildings, and for a year the school operated through a sponsor as Oasis Westbury, a small all-through independent school. The current sponsor E-ACT then opened the school as a state-maintained primary academy in September 2011.
- The current principal led the school at the end of its years as an independent school and through its transition into a primary academy. She was not present during the inspection. The vice-principal joined the academy in September 2012.
- The governing body has undergone a significant turnover in its membership during the course of the last year, with the appointment of six new governors, a new Chair in the autumn of 2012 and a new Vice-Chair shortly before this inspection.
- The academy's policy is to grow rapidly 'from below'. Its 90 places in the Reception class were fully subscribed in September, while numbers in the older year groups remain deliberately small. Pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 are taught together as a single class, and there is a mixed Years 2 and 3 class. There are three Reception classes, two Year 1 classes, and a further Year 2 class.
- In terms of total pupils on roll, the academy is now similar in size to most primary schools.
- The academy operates in part of the extensive buildings on the historic old site. Plans are being developed through the Department for Education and Bristol local authority for an extensive rebuild on the site.
- The characteristics and backgrounds of the pupils are changing rapidly as the school almost doubled in size in September 2012.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages is broadly average, but fewer pupils than average speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, which is the additional funding made available for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, pupils looked after in public care and children of service personnel, is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs has grown quickly over the year. Nonetheless, the proportion supported at school action is well below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well below average.
- In 2012, the academy met the government's floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment or progress.
- The academy operates a breakfast club before school hours and a programme of extension activities at the end of the core school day. An after-school club managed by a private provider also operates on the school site.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement in mathematics by:
  - developing teachers' subject knowledge and understanding
  - designing and implementing an agreed calculation policy to ensure consistent approaches to the subject throughout the academy
  - creating more opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their numeracy skills across other subjects of the curriculum
  - reviewing mathematics performance throughout the academy and producing a specific action

plan for improvement in the subject.

- Secure more consistently good teaching by:
    - ensuring that teachers use information about what pupils understand and can do to design tasks that are well suited to pupils' capabilities
    - ensuring that teachers are flexible enough to adapt their lesson plans when some pupils are finding work too hard or too easy.
  - Strengthen the capacity of leadership and management in the academy by developing a structure for middle leadership and distributing leadership responsibilities more widely across the academy.
  - Improve the governance of the academy by:
    - commissioning a review of governance and developing an action plan for improvement
    - ensuring that the governing body and/or its committees meet regularly enough to rapidly develop their effectiveness in carrying out their functions.
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## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Children start their Reception Year with skills that are generally above the levels expected for their age. They make good progress across all areas of learning and join Year 1 with high levels of attainment.
- A strong focus throughout the academy on the development of pupils' literacy begins in the Reception classes. Children are encouraged to read regularly at school and at home, and their early writing skills develop well. Children have opportunities to learn and explore independently, although such opportunities are constrained by the quality of the accommodation which restricts access to the outdoor area.
- Few pupils took the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 and only a small number were assessed at the end of Key Stage 1 in 2012. Assessments were high for boys at the end of Key Stage 1, although broadly average for girls. At the end of Key Stage 2, attainment was low overall for the six pupils who took the test, mainly because of poor progress for some in mathematics.
- The three pupils currently in Year 6 are on course to achieve the higher Level 5 in English and mathematics, confirming the volatility of results given small pupil numbers.
- School data indicate weaker attainment and progress in mathematics in a number of year groups across the school. While the school's data have accurately identified this problem, not enough has yet been done to diagnose the reasons for it or to identify solutions. Occasionally, it is evident that teachers lack confidence in aspects of mathematics. A lack of a whole-school approach to aspects of calculation and measurement means that learning is not always smoothly developed. Nonetheless, good learning was observed in a number of mathematics lessons and pupils showed resilience in solving problems.
- Pupils' attainment was high in the Year 1 phonics screening check of their reading ability in 2012. An extensive daily phonics programme for all years in the school underpins pupils' confidence in reading as the pupils systematically decode the sounds made by letters. When reading aloud, they do so with confidence and expression.
- The strong emphasis that the school places on pupils' learning about the technical aspects of language and grammar supports the progress of pupils with English as an additional language well.
- School monitoring of the relative attainment of pupils supported by the pupil premium shows that gaps in their attainment across English and mathematics are narrow at Key Stage 1 but broaden substantially across Key Stage 2. While numbers are small currently, the school is aware of the need to address this issue and promote further equality of opportunity for these pupils.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make similar overall progress to others. They benefit from individual education plans which set targets that are regularly reviewed by their class teacher with their parents. Learning support assistants often work effectively with individuals and small groups of pupils to boost their learning. However, where teachers spend too long talking to the class or moving too quickly through digital presentations on the whiteboard, lower attainers and pupils with special educational needs can become lost and confused.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Inspection evidence and the school's own observations confirm that while teaching in the majority of lessons is good, it is not consistently good enough to ensure that pupils always learn well and make good progress. A small fraction of the teaching seen was inadequate.
- Pupils learn well in those lessons where teachers prepare tasks that are well matched to the range of abilities in the class. Sometimes, however, teachers take too little account of pupils' prior understanding and skills so that work is too challenging for some or not challenging enough

for others. On occasions, teachers 'stick too closely to the script' of a lesson plan and are not quick enough to recognise when pupils are struggling to understand or ready to move on and learn more quickly.

- Most pupils apply themselves with determination when asked to solve problems independently or as a group. Sometimes, however, this independence is stifled when teachers talk for too long and pupils spend too long 'on the mat'.
- Teachers have warm relationships with their classes so that pupils are keen to cooperate and learn. Most teachers manage their classes effectively to ensure that pupils behave well. Teachers often plan effectively with other adults in the class to broaden the range of activities on offer and promote pupils' enjoyment.
- Teachers work hard to engage parents in their children's education through contact in the classrooms at the start of the day and regular updates on progress. Pupils' reading records are well maintained and often include very detailed comments from parents and teachers.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly and with increasingly helpful comments about how to improve. However, pupils do not always respond to these comments by making corrections or finishing incomplete work.
- Pupils are well aware of their targets for English and mathematics, and teachers regularly assess pupils' work with reference to these targets. There is less evidence of pupils assessing their own work or that of their peers. Pupils are, however, regularly encouraged to reflect on how positive their approaches to learning have been, and this helps promote good attitudes.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Pupils are polite, respectful, courteous, and helpful to staff and to visitors. They readily take on a range of responsibilities, for example as house captains and vice-captains, school councillors, playground friends and monitors. They participate enthusiastically in the wide range of after-school clubs available.
- Parents are very strongly of the opinion that their children are happy, safe and well behaved.
- Pupils feel safe and well cared for. They say that some pupils are too rough and boisterous in the playground, but that they feel very confident that staff will take any of their concerns seriously and resolve any difficulties. There are limited play facilities outside to absorb pupils' energies as the academy awaits plans for a rebuild of the site.
- Pupils have a good understanding of bullying and how to guard against it. There are few incidents of bullying but most parents feel, and academy records show, that these are dealt with effectively. The academy takes a firm line on tackling racism and other aspects of discrimination.
- Most pupils behave well in the classroom and have very positive attitudes to learning. Just occasionally pupils become fidgety and restless and engage in off-task behaviour when the teaching is repetitive or leaves some behind.
- Pupils take the school's rewards and sanctions systems very seriously. They are very keen to accumulate points for their houses through good behaviour. The school has an innovative and effective system for allowing 'offenders' to escape sanctions by demonstrating good behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance has improved. Last year it was below average, but in the year to date it is a little above average. Very few pupils are persistently absent.

### **The leadership and management** requires improvement

- The principal has established a clear vision for an inclusive primary academy based on traditional values which is widely shared by parents and staff. Questionnaire responses from parents and from staff were overwhelmingly positive.
- The principal has taken direct responsibility for leadership of most aspects of the academy's work, including, for example, the coordination of special educational needs provision and

leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

- The arrival of the vice-principal in September 2012 enabled some leadership responsibilities to be more widely shared. However, the lack of a tier of middle leadership constrains the ability of the academy to respond rigorously to the findings of its evaluation of its own performance. This self-evaluation is based on increasingly detailed tracking of pupils' achievement, accurate observations of the quality of teaching and scrutiny of pupils' books by senior leaders. It identifies very specific areas for improvement, but these have not all been given sufficient prominence in the school's action plans for improvement. A wider distribution of responsibility for leadership in these priority areas, such as mathematics and science, might enable action planning to be sharper and strengthen accountability for improvement through the academy.
  - The improvement of teaching is led effectively by the principal and vice-principal. Teachers were almost all new to the school when the academy opened and most are recently qualified, with many in their first or second year of teaching. Teachers are observed regularly and given clear feedback and support, which is demonstrably improving the practice of most. The system of performance management is in its early stages of implementation, but sets clear and quantifiable targets for all staff. It is intended that salary progression will be closely linked to good performance in the classroom and other duties.
  - The sponsor has worked constructively with the local authority to establish an academy which is clearly very popular with local parents. The local authority is providing helpful support to newly-appointed governors. The academy has not found it easy to establish working partnerships with other schools nearby and so the sponsor is facilitating closer links with other E-ACT academies in Bristol to share approaches to improvement.
  - The curriculum promotes pupils' literacy skills well. It makes a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through its international themes, collapsed curriculum days and an extensive after-school enrichment programme. Numeracy is promoted less effectively and systematically than literacy across the curriculum. Pupils are not always given enough time to complete work to a high standard in science. Within a generally rich programme of physical education, pupils do not have the opportunity to develop their swimming skills.
  - **The governance of the school:**
    - New governors have shown a commitment to understanding their new roles by attending initial training through the local authority. However, the governing body has been slow to establish effective means by which it can find out about the quality of provision in the academy. A skills audit for the current members of the governing body has yet to be completed so that governors can be allocated to areas of interest or strength and trained appropriately, including in the key area of special educational needs. The governing body and its committees has met infrequently.. As a consequence, many policies that appear on the school website are undated and do not have review dates. There is no formal mechanism yet in place for governors to monitor the management of the performance of staff and check that staff are only being rewarded for good performance. While the academy has recently commissioned a survey of parents' views, there are no regular forums by which the governing body can consult parents on the academy's provision and performance. When the governing body does meet, its minutes show that governors ask challenging questions of academy performance, reflecting some strong expertise of individual governors, including the Chair. Its requests for more 'user-friendly' data on pupil performance have, for example, led to helpful improvements in the school's systems for processing and presenting that information. It has rightly ensured that the academy accounts clearly for spending on the pupil premium and measures the impact of this. The academy meets current safeguarding requirements.
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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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137068
<b>Inspection number</b>	399834

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	231
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Mallen
<b>Principal</b>	Lynette Carter
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	0117 962 2616
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