

Swindon Academy

Beech Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1JR

Inspection dates 22–23 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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

- While achievement across the academy is improving rapidly, students in all key stages and subjects do not make consistently good progress.
- Teachers do not always plan activities and tasks to meet the needs of all students in their lessons. There are too few opportunities for pair and group work or for students to develop independent learning skills.
- Students' literacy and numeracy skills are not consistently developed in all lessons.
- The quality of assessment, both verbal and written, is variable. Students are not always clear about what they need to do to improve, and too few respond to teachers' written comments.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are not as positive as they could be in some lessons and, as a result, the pace of progress slows.
- The sixth form requires improvement because the teaching and the suitability of the courses for some students do not lead to consistently good achievement.
- Although leaders are bringing about rapid improvement, many of the initiatives and staff changes are too recent to show their full impact on students' learning or for new teaching practices to be consistently applied.
- Parents feel they have not been fully informed of the many recent changes in the academy.

The school has the following strengths

- The new Principal provides inspired leadership. She is supported very effectively by the Associate and Executive Principals, and together they work with relentless determination to secure rapid improvement.
- Staff at all levels are proud to be members of the academy and work with enthusiasm to help students with their learning, personal development and wellbeing.
- Children get off to a good start in the Nursery classes.
- Students say they feel safe in school.
- Leaders now rigorously monitor the quality of teaching and robustly tackle weaker teaching.
- Training, consultant support and teacher improvement programmes provide good opportunities for all staff to improve the quality of their teaching or develop their leadership and management skills.
- The academy has made good use of partnership arrangements to broaden students' learning opportunities.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons, each taught by different teachers across both sites. Eight were joint observations with members of the academy's senior leadership team. Three tutorial sessions and an assembly in the secondary phase were observed and a visit made to the Japanese Day activities at the Alton Close Site. In addition, the inspection team made some short visits to lessons as part of six learning walks with senior staff, listened to three small groups of students reading, and spoke to students around the academy throughout the inspection.
- The inspectors held meetings with four groups of students, academy staff, including senior and middle leaders, and the Chair of the Local Governing Body and two representatives from United Learning. Telephone calls were also made to leaders at three of the @Futsal provider sites across England and Wales. Inspectors also spoke informally to parents before and after school.
- The inspection team observed the academy's work and scrutinised a range of documents, including the academy's monitoring and planning documentation, internal student progress information and records relating to behaviour and attendance. Documents relating to safeguarding including case studies were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors also took account of the 33 responses to the online Parent View survey and analysed questionnaires completed by 114 staff.

Inspection team

Angela Corbett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Graham Marshall

Additional Inspector

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Additional Inspector

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Christopher Teal

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized all-through academy which opened in 2007. It has grown in size since the last inspection.
- The academy operates on two sites: the main site at Beech Avenue, where all age groups are taught, and another at Alton Close, for children aged from 3 to 11. It is divided into three phases, primary, secondary and sixth form, and students belong to one of four colleges within the academy.
- The academy is sponsored by United Learning, has specialisms in science with business and enterprise, and works in partnership with a number of schools and organisations but, in particular, with Marlborough College, @Futsal, Honda UK and The White Horse Federation.
- The academy has a high proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is almost double the national average. Around one fifth of students are supported through school action, which is also much higher than found nationally.
- Over half the pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those children from service families. This is much higher than average.
- Most students are of White British heritage with the proportion who speak English as an additional language lower than the national average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- A very few students in Key Stage 2 attend specialist provision on a part- and full-time basis at The Nyland Campus which is part of The White Horse Federation. A few students in Years 10 and 11 follow part-time courses at Swindon College or the Swindon @Futsal centres. Over 300 sixth form students attend full-time courses at @Futsal centres across England and Wales.
- Since the previous inspection, the Principal has left the school. The current Principal took up post in January 2012 and an Associate Principal joined the academy in February 2012. An Executive Principal for the primary phase was seconded to the academy in November 2012 for the current academic year and it is planned that a substantive Associate Principal will take up post April 2013. There have also been a considerable number of other staff changes across the academy at all levels.
- A Sure Start children's centre and privately managed childcare provision is run on the academy site but these did not form part of this inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good or better by ensuring that:
 - lessons are planned to more effectively cater for the different abilities within classes
 - teachers provide more opportunities for group and pair work
 - teachers use skilful questioning to help students extend their thinking and communication skills and to check their understanding of the work
 - students take more responsibility for their own learning by encouraging them to be more active and inquisitive in class
 - the quality of feedback in lessons and in marking provides students with clear and helpful guidance about how to improve and that this is responded to effectively.

- Raise attainment and progress across the academy, particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - increasing the proportion of students making expected or better progress at the end of each key stage
 - ensuring that teachers in all lessons reinforce and develop literacy and numeracy skills.

- Improve students' behaviour and attitudes to learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers are fully equipped to effectively support and manage students' behaviour in lessons
 - all staff apply the academy's behaviour policy and systems consistently.

- Improve parents' understanding of the changes taking place in the academy and help them to understand how they can support their children's learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 has risen since the last inspection. However, the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics remains below the national average. Attainment by the end of the primary phase is also below that found nationally. In part, this is due to a legacy of past underachievement as students have moved through the primary or secondary phase.
- In the last year, assessment and tracking systems have improved and the academy now has accurate and robust data about students' progress and attainment. Current school data shows that levels of attainment are rising for all academy students. However attainment in mathematics by the end of Key Stage 4 is not as good as in English and science. The use of early entry is helping to raise students' self-esteem and achieve higher grades.
- Effective use of the pupil premium funding includes new reading programmes, better tracking systems so that individual needs can be precisely identified and targeted support. As a result the academy is successfully narrowing the attainment gap for these students, both within the academy and in comparison to national averages for students in similar circumstances.
- Progress is similar at each key stage, including in Reception classes and in the sixth form, with the proportion making expected or better progress not comparing favourably with national expectations. There is evidence to indicate that recent improvements in teaching have led to much better rates of progress for students in all year groups.
- There is a similar pattern of progress for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. It is good for those with a statement of special educational needs but has been slower for some of those supported through school action and school action plus, although this is improving.
- New initiatives to improve both literacy and numeracy, such as reading programmes for students in the primary and secondary phases, targeted support and as a focus in lessons across different subjects are now in place. However, many of these are too recent to fully impact on students' numeracy, speaking, reading and writing skills.
- The proportion of sixth form students who are taught within the academy and complete courses has been below the national average because of some weaker teaching and the suitability of courses. However, the academy is addressing this effectively for current students, with much higher numbers of students now remaining on courses.
- The academy carefully tracks the progress of students who are educated off-site, including the significant number who attend the @Futsal centres. Success rates for these students in both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form on BTEC sport courses are good, with most of those in the sixth form achieving university places, employment or, for a few, sport scholarships overseas. College and the specialist provision are also providing effectively for the very few students who attend these.
- Attainment on entry to the Nursery classes is well below that expected for their age. Children make good progress in the Nursery classes, so that attainment on entry to the Reception classes is closer but still below age-related expectations.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Although teaching requires improvement because it remains too variable, its quality has improved at a rapid rate over the last two terms. As a result, an increasing proportion is good or better at all key stages, including the sixth form.
- In those lessons which require improvement, the pace of learning slows and students do not learn as rapidly as they could and some lose interest. This is because activities and tasks are not sufficiently stimulating or planned to support learning, and students are not always encouraged to think for themselves and become inquisitive and active learners.
- The verbal feedback that teachers give students in lessons on how well they are achieving and written comments from marking their work does not consistently provide them with clear guidance on what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. Teachers do not provide enough time for them to follow up on the feedback.
- In most classes, students are not given enough opportunities to develop their reading, writing and numeracy skills in different subjects to ensure that standards in English and mathematics move closer to the national average.
- Teaching in the Nursery classes is good. Among the positive features of all teaching throughout the academy are teachers' good subject knowledge and the good relationships evident between teachers, adults and students.
- Teachers have a good understanding of the differing needs and abilities of students within their classes. However, they do not all use this knowledge effectively to plan lessons to secure good or better progress for all students. A good example of effective practice was seen in a Year 2 numeracy lesson where the teacher made clear to the different ability groups what they were expected to achieve and then provided them with carefully matched work. Consequently, they all made good progress regardless of ability, including those with special educational needs.
- In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations, make effective use of time, use paired and group work and skilfully question students to challenge their thinking and promote their speaking and listening skills. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, students made good progress in learning to explain their ideas, both verbally and in writing, about social mobility because of the teacher's high expectations, well-designed activities which included the use of paired work to develop each other's ideas, and questioning to check understanding and guide them.
- Some lessons promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. For example, in a Year 7 geography lesson, students were comparing housing in an underdeveloped country with that of this country, but opportunities are missed across the academy.
- The recent improvements in the tracking of students' progress across all year groups has led to more effective use of staffing, including teaching assistants, to target support and additional help for students with special educational needs and those who are eligible for the pupil premium funding. As a result, progress rates are improving and these students have equal opportunities to succeed.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The attitudes to learning of students' in the primary and secondary phases are not consistently good. Students engage and behave well in most lessons when activities are interesting, varied

and well matched to their levels of ability. At other times, students in these phases lose focus and, in a very few lessons, learning is disrupted. Behaviour in the sixth form and Nursery classes is good.

- The new behaviour for learning policy introduced in April 2012 sets out clearly the expectations of staff and students and how teachers should deal with incidents of poor behaviour. The number of exclusions has reduced significantly in the last year and both students and staff agree that behaviour has improved. However, they also feel that incidents of poor behaviour are not always well managed and that policies and systems are not always applied consistently across the academy to support good behaviour. Inspection evidence supports these views, as did a few of the parents spoken to and those that responded to the online Parent View survey.
- Students of all ages are courteous to visitors, staff and each other. The new vertical tutoring system in the secondary phase is helping students in Years 7 to 11 of all backgrounds to get on well together and one Key Stage 3 student explained how an older student had provided help.
- Students in the primary phase are taught separately from those in the secondary phase and sixth form. Students can be a little boisterous at break and lunchtimes and when moving around the school because they have yet to fully learn how to take responsibility for their behaviour.
- Students are aware of different forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying, name-calling and homophobic bullying. Students of all ages told inspectors that they feel safe in the school; a view supported by the school's own student survey data and by almost all staff in their responses to the inspection questionnaire and the large majority of parents who responded to the online Parent View survey. A very few of the parents spoken to raised concerns about how effectively bullying is dealt with. Inspectors investigated this and found the academy's systems were followed and that discrimination or bullying of any kind is not tolerated. Students felt that if they have a problem, they can talk to an adult who would help them.
- The academy has introduced more rigorous procedures for attendance, including for those who learn off-site. As a result, both punctuality and attendance have improved significantly; persistent absence rates are reducing and attendance is moving closer to the national average. The academy has been particularly successful at improving the attendance of students who are supported by the pupil premium. The pupil premium has funded additional staffing to track absences and encourage students to attend. These and other initiatives have helped to improve these students' attendance which, in turn, is helping them to make better academic progress.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Standards have risen since the last inspection but they remain below the national average. Many of the improvements seen during the inspection, particularly in the primary phase, are very recent. They are predominantly driven at senior leadership level and have yet to fully impact on students' progress to secure higher standards across the academy over time, particularly in English and mathematics.
- The Principal, Associate Principal and seconded Executive Principal for the primary phase make a formidable team. Their self-evaluation of the academy is exceptionally insightful, accurately identifying the strengths and areas for improvement. They are visionary in their approach and work with a relentless determination to bring about rapid improvement. They have clearly communicated their vision to the staff, who are working with commitment and enthusiasm to move the academy forward. However, they have not kept parents fully informed of the many changes or kept them sufficiently involved in their children's learning.

- Improving the performance of staff is the key driver to raising standards. The monitoring of teaching is now more rigorous and weaknesses in teaching have been tackled robustly. Effective training, support from consultants and access to teacher improvement programmes are resulting in significant improvements in the quality of teaching and in supporting staff new to the academy or in new roles.
- New systems to track the progress of all students are more effective at identifying any underachievement, checking that the gaps between groups are narrowing and so ensuring equality of opportunity. There are rigorous systems in place for quality assuring all aspects of the off-site provision and for checking the progress of the students who attend these.
- The range of subjects taught is broad and balanced in the primary and secondary phases. Many schemes of work are being revised to better support students' learning, although these changes have yet to fully impact on students' progress. Partnership arrangements broaden students' learning opportunities, such as those with @Futsal and Marlborough College. For sixth formers taught within the academy, there is access to an appropriate balance of academic and vocational subjects, and the academy is considering improvements to better meet their aptitudes and interests.
- Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, while promoted across all phases, requires improvement. There is no coordinated approach either to ensure its promotion across all subjects or to fully capitalise on special events such as the Japan day that was supported by Honda UK that took place during the inspection.
- United Learning make good use of the expertise of staff across their group to support improvement, such as the appointment of the associate headteacher and secondment of the acting head of sixth form. They have also identified and financed external sources of expertise.
- Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is organised in two tiers. The upper tier is provided by the academy sponsor United Learning with overall responsibility for the performance of the academy. A local governing body holds the academy to account for all the operational aspects, including the quality of teaching and safeguarding. Members of both tiers provide a breadth of knowledge and expertise and are now well informed about students' performance and how the performance of teachers is managed, making sure that performance merits salary progression. They have taken incisive action to support the academy in raising standards, improving students' life chances and in tackling underperformance. The recently formed raising attainment board is holding the academy to account with greater rigour. Both the upper tier and the local governing body take responsibility for ensuring that the academy's finances are managed well. They have a clear view of how the pupil premium funding is being used to provide additional support for the more disadvantaged pupils and they now regularly check on the effectiveness of the expenditure. The more strategic approach to the use of this funding is helping these students to make better progress.

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	135364
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	402695

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1695
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	418
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sir Anthony Greener
Headteacher	Ruth Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	27–28 January 2010
Telephone number	01793 426900
Fax number	01793 426901
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