

The Winsford E-ACT Academy

Grange Lane, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 2BT

Inspection dates 12–13 February 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

- While over half of teaching is good, the remainder is not ensuring that all students make progress at least in line with national expectations.
- Not all teachers are helping students to use literacy skills. As a result, some students lack care in presentation and spell common words incorrectly.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students are making progress broadly in line with expectations, although there is some variability between different subjects.
- Not all students are attentive enough or involved as fully as they should be in their learning. This is because teachers are not routinely planning work that meets the needs of the different ability groups in their classes.
- The plans leaders, the governing body and sponsors have for the use of pupil premium funding from the government do not make clear what difference the funding is intended to make to students' learning and progress.
- The academy is improving all aspects of its work and outcomes for students. However, much of the checking of students' progress and quality of teaching has been undertaken by the senior leadership team rather than those responsible for leading subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal and his senior leaders provide determined leadership. They have improved the quality of teaching and ensured only those teachers who provide at least good teaching have moved up the pay scale.
- The academy promotes students' cultural awareness well.
- Where support is targeted, students, including those who are disabled or have special educational needs, achieve well.
- The attendance of students is rising and closer to national averages than in the past.
- Students' behaviour has improved and exclusions reduced.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 37 lessons during the inspection. In four of these lessons inspectors and academy leaders evaluated the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour together. Thirty six teachers were observed. One observation took place in the Internal Support Centre which provides support for students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, particularly in relation to behaviour. During lessons inspectors looked at students' work and listened to a number of them read.
- Inspectors observed the work of the academy outside lessons, including at break and lunchtimes and in the sessions with form tutors at the beginning of each day.
- Inspectors met with four groups of students representing Years 7 and 8, Year 9, Year 10, Year 11, and Years 12 and 13. Meetings were also held with senior leaders in relation to leadership, the achievement of students, teaching, and behaviour and safety. A meeting was held with two representatives of the governing body and sponsor. In addition, a telephone discussion took place with both the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director General of E-ACT.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised including that relating to the academy's evaluation of its effectiveness; the performance of students, including those with disabilities and/or special educational needs; the performance of teachers; and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took into account the 12 responses to Parent View and the 19 questionnaires received from staff.

Inspection team

Mark Williams, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mary Liptrot

Additional Inspector

Kathleen Harris

Additional Inspector

David Woodhouse

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is the academy's first section 5 inspection. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors visited the academy in January 2012 to check on the progress it was making in raising standards. At that time it was judged to be making satisfactory progress.
- The academy opened in September 2010. It replaced the former Verdin High and Woodford Lodge Schools. For the first year of its existence the academy operated on the two predecessor school sites. It is now based at the Grange Lane site and is due to move into new purpose-built premises in September 2013. The academy is larger than average in size compare to other secondary schools in England.
- The academy has an internal resource base called the Internal Support Centre which provides support for potentially vulnerable students.
- The sixth form is in its infancy. The first results for Year 13 students will not be available until summer 2013.
- The Principal has been in post since April 2011.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government to support students eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority) is above average. Very few pupils are looked after.
- The great majority of students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is about average and rising.
- Also about average and rising is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need.
- In both 2011 and 2012 the academy met the government's current floor standard which sets out the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better and the learning of students is at least in line with national expectations by ensuring all teachers:
 - give high priority to ensuring the literacy skills of students, regardless of subject taught, are at a sufficient level to allow them to participate fully in their learning
 - are clear in their lessons what the different ability groups are to learn so that all students are involved fully in lessons and challenged to do their best
 - mark work in a way that identifies what it is students need to do to improve
 - demand all work is completed.
- In their use of pupil premium funding, leaders, the governing body and sponsors should make clear in their plans what difference they intend it to make to students' learning and progress.
- Further develop the skills of those responsible for subjects and the sixth form in the regular checking of students' progress and the quality of teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The proportion of students in 2012 gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, was disappointing. Even allowing for below average starting points, a higher proportion of students than found nationally did not make enough progress.
- A major factor in this weaker than expected progress was the false ceiling previously placed on students in English and mathematics. Once students had achieved a grade C, they were not provided with the opportunity to improve upon their grade. This is no longer the case. Now, students are expected to get a higher grade. Early indications are that this policy is paying dividends.
- The achievement of students entitled to free school meals improved from 2011 to 2012, although the proportion attaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, lags behind that of their peers. Nevertheless, while their average point scores remain lower than those of other students, the gap is closing.
- While disappointing, the results for 2012 were a significant improvement on those attained by the predecessor schools. In some areas results were promising and highlighted progress at least in line with national expectations. The proportions of students gaining grades A*-C in English Literature, science and religious education, for example, were above national averages. Likewise, those who took a language generally achieved well.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve as well as their peers. Where support is targeted, for example through short term programmes to support reading, they achieve well. Often, though, in lessons it is not clear how what this group are to learn is shaped to make it appropriate to their needs.
- A key factor in holding back achievement is the worsening picture of low attainment on entry to the academy. Generally speaking, students' literacy skills are weak. The way in which teachers seek to promote these basic skills is variable. In some lessons, attention to literacy is cursory and, as a result, students' written work is untidy and littered with errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Conversely, some teachers have high expectations. Year 8 students, for example, were challenged by their teacher to make detailed notes that could be used for a longer piece of writing. Because this teacher had consistently over the year demanded that sentences be formed correctly, the students produced well-written notes which strengthened their understanding of the Holocaust.
- The achievement of students in the sixth form is broadly in line with expectations. While predominantly good teaching and learning was observed during the inspection, over time learning has been more variable because students' attendance has not always been good. There is some variability between subjects with, for example, drama, business studies and construction being stronger performers.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Leaders have been successful in improving the quality of teaching so that over half of it is good or better. However, too large a proportion is not good enough to eradicate the underachievement evident in the predecessor schools or weaknesses in students' previous learning.
- Not enough attention is given to what different ability groups are to learn in lessons. This means that in some lessons all students do much the same work. This lack of attention to the needs of different groups also leads to students not being challenged to do their best and, on occasion, switching off and not being as fully involved in their learning as they should be.
- The marking of students' work is inconsistent. Not enough makes clear to students the next steps they should take.
- Not all work set is completed. This means that students lose track of what they have been

taught.

- For some teachers there is an over-dependence on students just writing notes on worksheets. While valuable to a point, where these are used too often, students are not getting enough opportunities to write longer pieces of work.
- There is, however, good and outstanding teaching across the academy, including in the sixth form, as a result of determined leadership. In these lessons all students make at least expected and often better progress in their learning regardless of their ability.
- In the best lessons, there are high expectations of what students should learn and activities are structured well to gain their interest. Year 11 history students, for example, thoroughly enjoyed making paper planes as 'communist' or 'capitalist' workers in order to prepare themselves for discussing, describing and explaining what these different ideologies stand for. As a result of this good planning and the teacher's probing questions, students made good progress and wrote well-structured paragraphs.
- Outstanding teaching in a Year 10 English lesson saw students make excellent progress in analysing the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Excellent questioning by the teacher, always demanding more, ensured students contributed answers confidently and clearly and illustrated their responses with extracts from the text. The teacher, in addition, gave high priority to the way responses both said and written were formed.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The underlying reason why this aspect of the academy's work is not good is that, because of the inconsistency in teaching, too many students are not as involved in their learning as they should be. This means attitudes to learning for some students are not as strong as they ought to be. Even in the sixth form, some students see study periods as 'free periods' rather than times to work.
- The pupil premium funding has been used well to bring about some good improvements in behaviour and attendance. Attendance has risen sharply and is no longer low. Through the work of the Inclusion Support Centre the behaviour of students at risk of exclusion has improved. Exclusion rates, as a result, have fallen.
- Behaviour around school is generally good. Students were most positive about these improvements and pointed to only rare examples of poor behaviour and bullying. While they are confident instances of poor behaviour and bullying would be dealt with, they reported inconsistency in the way different teachers managed behaviour. This was observed by inspectors too. While in most cases instances less than good were challenged, this was not always the case. Nevertheless, the academy is an orderly community and students are confident they are kept safe.
- The promotion of students' cultural awareness is a strength of the academy's work. Displays around the academy celebrate students' work and achievements. This promotes a sense of community and provides positive role models, for example of students who have achieved well in a range of examinations. Displays also highlight students' wider awareness of issues across the globe, for example through thought provoking images of children's art from Gaza to students' own experiences of schools in Kenya.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The Principal and his senior leaders have shown great determination in securing important improvements against a backdrop of bringing two schools in challenging circumstances together, operating for the first year of the academy's existence on two sites, and, more recently, dealing with a reduction in funding. In the main, staff express confidence in their leaders. They are right to do so.

- Leaders have been successful in increasing the proportion of good and better teaching. They have not just focused on one-off lessons but, instead, have looked at teaching and its impact on learning over time. This has meant they have an accurate view of quality as demonstrated by the complete agreement of inspectors and joint observers during this inspection. The result of this accuracy is that teachers who need to improve are given clear and challenging targets in order to do so. Teacher performance is checked carefully and only those who are good teachers have been allowed to progress up the pay scale.
 - Leaders' and governors' evaluation of the academy's effectiveness is wholly accurate. Their reviews are based on an honest appraisal that their work cannot be good until outcomes have improved. Much of the checking is undertaken by senior leaders. An increasing amount is undertaken by those responsible for different subjects and areas. However, not enough is checked by these different leaders, including those in the sixth form, so they have a keen awareness of teaching quality and pupil outcomes in their areas of responsibility.
 - At the time of the monitoring inspection in January 2012 some targets for improvement were overly ambitious. Now, because of the accuracy of checks already made, plans for improvement are appropriate, challenging and realistic.
 - The academy's curriculum requires improvement. Last year students were disadvantaged by not being able to improve on the grades they had achieved after taking examinations early in English and/or mathematics. This is not the case this year. Leaders are also bringing changes to the type of course students participate in. Some current courses are not providing students with enough challenge. These are being replaced so that all students benefit from a course most suited to their needs. The curriculum promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and especially cultural development well.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body and the sponsor have ensured statutory requirements have been met, particularly in relation to safeguarding. Both, like leaders, because of the way in which they work together to support and challenge the academy, have an accurate view of the strengths to be built upon and weaknesses to be addressed. They ask good questions and expect considered responses which, in turn, they receive. In considering the tight financial situation the academy has been in this year, governors and the sponsor have ensured the pupil premium funding has not been swallowed up for purposes it was not intended. They, along with leaders, have ensured it has been put to good use to support those students for whom attendance and behaviour has been a concern, through the Inclusion Support Centre for example. There has been less clarity, however, in their plans to how this funding should benefit the learning of those students it is intended for.
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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	136184
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	399812

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	1,040
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tom Peryer
Principal	Andrew Taylor-Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01606 592300
Fax number	01606 863 562
Email address	info@winsfordacademy.org.uk

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