

The Vale Academy

Grammar School Road, Brigg, North Lincolnshire, DN20 8BA

Inspection dates 6–7 March 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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students' achievement is good and in some subjects, they make outstanding progress from their starting points in Year 7.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make outstanding progress, as a result of first-rate attention to their needs.
- The quality of teaching is improving rapidly. Most students speak in glowing terms about how teachers go out of their way 'to make learning fun, but hard'.
- In some subjects, teaching is of exceptionally high quality and among the best that inspectors had seen.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress by the time they leave in Year 13.
- Behaviour and safety are exemplary. Inspectors were impressed with students' maturity, their awareness of how to stay safe and how considerate they were towards each other and to adults.
- Academy leaders rigorously check the quality of teaching. Where weaknesses are detected, improvements are quickly put into place.
- The principal knows each student well, is highly visible around the academy and leads by example. Her inspirational leadership has led to sustainable and impressive improvements since the academy opened.
- The governing body provides exceptional challenge to all aspects of the academy's work and has been instrumental in bringing about improvements.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students in the sixth form find the leap in the difficulty of work from Year 11 to Year 12 difficult so they make less progress in that year than in other year groups.
- The quality of teachers' marking in students' books varies too much in quality. Sometimes comments are too vague or students do not have the opportunity to act on the advice that they are given.
- There are sometimes missed opportunities for students to use and improve their language skills in all lessons; particularly improving their spelling and writing.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 42 lessons taught by 39 teachers of which five were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, the inspection team made a number of visits to small group lessons for students with special educational needs.
- Meetings were held with groups of staff, students, members of the governing body and a representative from the academy sponsor, the School Partnership Trust Academies.
- Inspectors took account of the 78 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. The lead inspector spoke to one parent on the telephone.
- Inspectors scrutinised a number of documents including academy improvement plans, minutes of the governing body meetings and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Robert Jones, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Janet Pruchniewicz

Additional Inspector

Barbara Waugh

Additional Inspector

James McGrath

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is smaller than the average sized secondary academy.
- A below average proportion of students is eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for those students in local authority care, for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those from armed service families).
- The proportion of students with special educational needs and supported through school action is below average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action plus or through statements of special educational needs is above average.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage.
- In 2012, the academy met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- At the time of the inspection, two students received off-site training on a part time basis from the provider 'The Forest School'.
- A collaborative arrangement exists with the nearby Sir John Nelthorpe School for sixth form provision.
- The academy opened in September 2011 and is part of the School Partnership Trust Academies. The academy works in close collaboration with a special school and with other academies within the Trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement and further improve the quality of teaching so they become outstanding by:
 - preparing students so they are better able to cope with the demands placed on them in Year 12 and, therefore, make more progress in that year
 - ensuring every opportunity is taken for students to improve their spelling and improve and apply their writing skills across all subjects
 - improving the quality and consistency of marking so that students are left in no doubt what they must do to improve their work
 - giving students the opportunity to read, respond to and improve their work as a result of reading teachers' comments on their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' achievement has improved rapidly since the academy opened in September 2011. They make good and often outstanding progress from their starting points and reach above average standards.
- In English, students of all abilities make outstanding progress. In mathematics, students make good progress, but this too is improving rapidly with Year 11 students on track to make outstanding progress.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make outstanding progress. This is because the special courses designed to boost reading, writing and mathematics skills closely meet their needs. They are checked carefully to ensure they have a positive effect on every student.
- One student summed up the high quality support by saying, 'I had serious problems... what future do you have if you can't read? My reading has improved so much that I now have a future'.
- Pupil premium funding is used very well by the academy to ensure no student falls behind. The 'Study Plus' course successfully boosts students' literacy skills and one-to-one support is provided when necessary. There is a small difference in the attainment in English and mathematics between those students who are and those who are not eligible for the pupil premium, although gaps are closing and these students made good progress.
- Students targeted for the Year 7 catch up programme achieve well and gaps in achievement between groups of students are closing rapidly.
- Students are sometimes entered for mathematics examinations early, but this does not have an effect on their progress, which is good and rapidly improving.
- Students achieve well in the sixth form. Progress is better in Year 13 than in Year 12 because students find the work in Year 12 more demanding than in Year 11 and it takes time for them to adjust.

The quality of teaching is good

- In most lessons, students apply themselves well and teachers give students ample opportunities to take part in discussions, group work and debates. This ensures students are fully involved in their own learning.
- Teachers question students well, ensuring that they answer in full sentences to develop their speaking and reasoning skills. Teachers, through their good quality progress data, know which students need pushing further and they probe for better answers from these students.
- Moreover, teachers are well aware of those students who may be struggling. They break down questions for them so they have an equal opportunity to be successful when they are asked questions.
- In some departments, such as design and technology, teaching is exemplary. In one lesson, students worked very independently, constantly using success criteria to check their progress and helping each other with intricate gluing. This enabled the teacher to give highly individual support and feedback that helped every student to make outstanding progress.
- Teaching assistants provide high quality support. They are well guided by the teachers and do not give too much support to students. Consequently, disabled students and those who have special educational needs become confident, independent learners who make outstanding progress.
- In English and mathematics lessons, teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. However, in other subjects there are sometimes missed opportunities for students to improve their spelling and to improve and apply their writing skills.

- The quality of marking is inconsistent and does not always pinpoint precisely what a student should do to improve their work. Moreover, when teachers give good quality feedback, time is rarely set aside for the students to respond to and act on the advice that is given.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' conduct around the academy, their excellent manners, mature attitudes towards each other and to adults are exemplary.
- Inspectors were highly impressed with the depth of thought and consideration students gave to their disabled peers. This enables disabled students to feel highly valued and surrounded by friends who are keen to help and include them in everything they do.
- This high level of awareness does not happen by chance. The extremely caring ethos of the academy emphasises mutual respect, celebration of success and tolerance and has had a deep positive and long-lasting effect on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- Members of the governing body make unannounced spot checks on behaviour and safety across the academy. This has helped the academy leaders to keep right on top of behaviour.
- Students say that any bullying or harassment is quickly dealt with and that there is always a caring ear to turn to if the need arises. All students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs feel safe and secure.
- In lessons, students' behaviour is excellent. They apply themselves diligently to their work, particularly when they are given opportunities to work in groups and solve problems for themselves.
- Sixth form students are excellent role models in the school, taking on responsibilities such as listening to students reading or assisting in lessons.
- Students' knowledge of how to stay safe when using modern technology is well developed. They are aware of the importance of security settings and know what to do if faced with inappropriate messages.
- The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire 'Parent View' were happy with behaviour. Where parents expressed concerns, these were investigated thoroughly by inspectors. Inspectors concluded these were individual parental concerns which overall did not affect the prevailing picture that behaviour and safety are outstanding. However, these concerns did sometimes relate to the quality of teachers' marking.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- In her distinctive high-visibility coat, the principal spends a great deal of her time talking to students, all of whom she knows by name, and checking that the academy is running smoothly. This is time extremely well spent, because she is able to identify and anticipate problems early.
- Through her visionary approach, she has created a palpable sense of shared responsibility to which each of the senior leaders subscribe. All the senior team are extremely supportive of each other; often sharing roles or assisting each other as they check on key areas of teaching or the curriculum.
- In turn, this means that any areas of weakness are quickly identified and swift action eliminates them. For example, in the 2012 examinations, high attaining students underachieved in mathematics. Without delay, checks were made on teaching that resulted in impressive improvements in the January 2013 examinations.
- The principal's weekly 'drop-in' clinic has enabled parents to express any concerns they may have and for academy leaders to deal with them efficiently. In turn, parents report that they have high confidence in the academy's ability to deal with their concerns and that they feel very well informed.
- Teachers' performance is managed rigorously and this has led to rapid improvements in the

quality of teaching over time. Every teacher is given challenging targets to improve the quality of their teaching. Any underperformance is tackled decisively by academy leaders.

- There are excellent opportunities for teachers and academy leaders to share their expertise across other academies, helping to improve their skills.
 - A close partnership with a special school has helped staff to improve their knowledge of how best to support disabled students and those who have special educational needs. This has also helped to develop a very effective curriculum for those students, helping them to make rapid and sustained progress.
 - The curriculum has been improved significantly over the past 18 months. Previously, some students did not make as much progress as they should because too many were entered for examinations in Year 10, before they were fully ready to take them. The improvements have had a very positive effect on improving students' rates of progress.
 - The arts, particularly music have a high profile in the academy. Many students are involved in arts activities and, during the inspection, students were involved in a joint project with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Taking part in activities such as these helps to develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.
 - Off-site training provided by The Forest School is rigorously checked by academy leaders to make sure that it closely meets the students' needs and that they are kept safe.
 - The academy meets all current safeguarding requirements fully.
 - The academy sponsor gives very high quality support, while allowing the academy to retain its very distinctive caring ethos and emphasis on music and technology.
 - **The governance of the academy:**
 - The governing body give high quality support and challenge to academy leaders. Its members have good complementary skills, for example, in helping the academy with finance and budgeting. The governing body are extremely rigorous in challenging the management of teachers' performance and have successfully ensured there is a close link between teachers' abilities and their progression on the pay scale. The governing body have an excellent understanding of achievement and how this compares with similar schools and is able through high quality training, to interpret data and challenge academy leaders. Its members keep a close eye on how the pupil premium funding is used and that it is successful in benefiting students. The governing body benefits greatly from sharing expertise with other governing bodies in the chain of academies.
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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	137453
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	402757

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	756
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steven Morris
Principal	Gail Young
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01652 652908
Fax number	01652 650245
Email address	info@valeacademy.org.uk

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