

Staffordshire University Academy

Marston Road, Hednesford, Cannock, WS12 4JH

Inspection dates 19–20 March 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		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

- Teaching is not consistently good enough to make sure students, particularly the most able, make good progress.
- Students do not make the progress they are capable of in GCSE science, and not all students continue to study mathematics and English until the end of Year 11.
- Boys' progress is low when compared to that of the girls, and requires improvement.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Too many students who take A-level courses do not proceed beyond the first year of their course, and overall achievement requires improvement.
- Students are not given enough opportunities to work in groups, or by themselves, without frequent help from the teacher.
- The questions teachers ask in lessons do not always extend students' learning or help them to understand their work.
- Since the academy has opened, leaders have not made sure that students can take a GCSE in a modern foreign language or separate sciences.
- Improvements to the quality of teaching and learning have not been made quickly enough to improve achievement strongly, and new initiatives to bring about these improvements have not yet had a full impact.

The school has the following strengths

- Students behave well around school and in lessons, especially when they are highly engaged in their work.
- The Principal's clear ambition for continued improvement is shared by all staff
- The academy uses its specialism of sport and health well to support improvements to these aspects across the local community.
- Links with the sponsor are positive and the academy has good plans to work closely with the university to support improvements to the quality of teaching and leadership.
- Governors work well with the academy. They are identifying areas that need improvement and giving both advice and practical support.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 29 lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with staff, students and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body, who are also members of the academy's sponsor, the Staffordshire University Trust.
- They took account of 30 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They observed the academy's work and analysed 36 staff questionnaires.
- They looked carefully at examination results for 2012 and the results of GCSE examinations Year 11 students have already completed, assessment records, records of the meetings of the governing body, equalities policies, and the academy's development plans and evaluations.

Inspection team

Michael Smith, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Hickerton

Additional Inspector

Lynn Cox

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller-than-average-sized academy, sponsored by the Staffordshire University Trust, which opened in September 2011.
- Its predecessor school was Blake Valley Technology College.
- Over a third of students supported by the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority or from armed service families. This is above average.
- The proportion of students are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average. The proportion supported through school action is below average.
- Three students are educated away from the school site at The Bridge in Lichfield, the Collegiate Centre for Values & Education Birmingham and South Staffordshire College.
- The academy has received a number of awards including those for Healthy Schools and in recognition of the information advice and guidance (IAG) they give their students. Its predecessor school was recognised as one of the most improved schools.
- The academy works with two other local schools to provide sixth form lessons. This collaboration is reducing as the academy is working towards taking full responsibility for its own sixth form.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- At the time of the inspection the 'centre' of the academy was being rebuilt as part of a complete programme to build a new academy. This caused some disruption to the normal running of the academy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make more teaching good or outstanding by ensuring that:
 - teaching consistently challenges all students, especially the most able, boys, and disabled students and those who have special educational needs
 - students have more opportunities to discuss their work with each other, and to work by themselves without direct intervention from the teacher
 - teachers regularly ask questions to find out what students know, and then follow these up with more complex and searching questions to extend their understanding and learning
 - the targets set for improving teachers' performance include clear and precise details of what needs to be improved.
- Raise achievement, particularly for the most able and for sixth form students, by ensuring that:
 - students who take GCSE science are given the support they need to make good progress
 - students do not stop studying GCSE English and mathematics until they have achieved their best possible grade
 - students who start A-level courses are successful at the end of Year 12, and then carry on and complete their courses.
- Extend opportunities for students to study:
 - a modern foreign language across the school
 - triple science at GCSE
 - sixth form courses which better match their abilities and interests.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students start at the academy with standards which are below average. Results for 2012 show that the overall progress students made from these starting points requires improvement. Girls consistently made better progress than boys, and the academy is working hard to improve boys' achievement and reduce the gap by providing more appealing and challenging activities for boys. Records of students' progress indicate that there has been some early success.
- The progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs requires improvement. In 2012 some supported at school action level made progress in line with national expectations but those who receive support at school action plus made less progress, often because of other complex needs. The current information on students' progress shows that it is improving, and all these students are now achieving broadly in line with expectations.
- The small group of students who are being educated off-site are in the early days of attending their placements, and are being assessed to determine the best programme for them to follow. In previous years such students have been well supported to overcome considerable barriers to learning, so they have completed their full-time education and then gone on into further education, a job or training.
- Students are entered early for both GCSE English language and mathematics. The majority then go on to try to better their grade or study literature in English. Some who achieve a grade C or better in only one subject spend additional time with the other, and some gain a grade C or better but this is below their target grade. This means that some students do not continue studying both English and mathematics, and do not gain as high a grade as they may have been capable of reaching if they had continued with their studies to the end of Year 11.
- The results for English language in 2012 were below the academy's estimates and require improvement. The academy has responded by ensuring students who capable of gaining at least a grade C are supported to reach this goal.
- Achievement in mathematics was in line with expectations in 2012. Results already completed for students in the current Year 11 show a significant improvement. Some higher ability students are already studying aspects of A-level mathematics.
- Achievement in GCSE science is below average. No students completed GCSE courses for the separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics. The academy has made suitable plans to increase the proportion of students studying GCSE sciences and reduce the proportion taking a BTEC qualification in the subject.
- Entries for qualifications at Key Stage 4, other than for English and mathematics, are mainly for work-related subjects with students taking fewer GCSE examinations. In 2012 and for 2013 students have not had the opportunity to study for a GCSE in a modern foreign language. Results for GCSE art and design and for religious education are well above average.
- Achievement at A level varies and requires improvement. In some subjects like mathematics students achieve well, but in others too many students fail their courses at the end of Year 12 and do not then go on to complete the A level.
- The pupil premium has been used effectively to give groups of students additional help with their reading, writing and mathematics in preparation for the GCSE examinations. The difference in average levels of attainment for English and mathematics between these students and students overall has reduced and is less than that found nationally. Funds have also been used

to make sure students are not disadvantaged and can go on educational visits. Some are about to go to Spain as part of the academy's first language visit. Very few students left last year without going on to education, a job or training.

- Recently introduced government funds to support students who start Year 7 with limited skills in reading and mathematics have been used to help improve their reading. Early results show some students make very big improvements to their reading levels.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not consistently good and requires improvement. Students do not make the progress they are fully capable of across a wide variety of subjects. They do not get down to their work quickly enough, often because they have to listen to teachers' explanations for too long.
 - There has been a focus on making sure lessons are planned to meet the differing ability levels within classes. However, in some lessons the work for the more-able students is not covered, as they have to work through the easier work first and there is limited time for them to be challenged with the work.
 - The quality of questioning by teachers is variable. Some teachers do not ask searching questions to find out what students know, then extend learning by using the answers to ask a more demanding question, or help students to understand their work by getting them to explain their responses. When teachers use questions well in lessons they expect students to give longer answers and to justify what they have said, as well as getting them to use discussion as a way of preparing answers.
 - Students say they enjoy practical activities and working in groups. This gives them more responsibility to choose how they work, and helps them to develop good independent learning skills by being away from the direct control of the teacher. Opportunities to work like this are limited in some classes.
 - Since the academy opened there has been a focus on students improving their reading, writing and calculation skills in lessons in most subjects. Students often look at key vocabulary and all rooms have a metre length identified so that students have a better understanding of length.
 - In the best lessons when teaching is good or outstanding, staff share personal experiences to bring greater relevance and realism to the work. Teaching assistants are often used well to support individuals or groups of students.
 - In many lessons assessment is used well, especially when students have opportunities to identify strengths and areas for improvement in each other's work. Marking is variable. In the very best marking, teachers identify what students need to do to improve their work and then give clear advice on how they could achieve better. Students then respond to teachers' comments. Sometimes marking is not frequent or detailed enough to be helpful, and students are not always expected to respond to teachers' comments.
 - Students are provided with good opportunities for their spiritual development. Art work around the academy is of a very high standard and in lessons students are made to think in a different way, for example considering how many bacteria would fit across a human hair. Students discuss moral issues, for example the moral dilemma when separating conjoined twins who share a vital organ.
 - Cultural development is supported through students taking part in cultural events. They were
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keen to talk about the recent performance of *Grease*. Students also learn about world cultures, for example by learning about the Spanish Civil war through the medium of Spanish. When given the right opportunities, students work well in groups to develop their social skills.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour around the academy and in the majority of lessons is good. Students respond well to their teachers, and can control their own behaviour well. During the inspection, students behaved as well when taught by temporary staff as they did when taught by permanent staff.
- Relationships between students and staff are good and the academy supports students who have additional social and emotional problems well.
- Students say that bullying incidents occur from time to time, but they are rare. When they do occur they often relate to the way a student looks, or is expressing their individuality by being different.
- The personal, social, and health education (PSHE) programme, along with assemblies, is used well to inform students of the different types of bullying and also the implications of being bullied or being a bully. Students have received advice on how to prevent bullying using computers or mobile phones, and how to make sure personal settings on social networking sites are at the most appropriate level.
- Students receive a good range of information to help keep themselves safe. This includes advice on sexual health, which they receive from the school nurse, and substance abuse, including both cigarettes and alcohol. Students also understand the worth of different types of relationships, and are challenged if they use words like 'gay' in an inappropriate manner. During the building programme students also have a good understanding of what they need to do and take extra care. The academy works well with external agencies such as therapists to support students who have social and emotional problems.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Since the academy opened there have been number of changes of role for senior leaders, as well as new senior and subject leaders starting. The resulting initiatives have not yet had sufficient impact to bring about sustained improvements. The quality of teaching and achievement are improving, but not yet rapidly enough.
- The academy has identified areas for further improvement and has good plans to bring about the necessary changes. For example, plans are currently being finalised to work closely with the sponsor, Staffordshire University, to support improvements in teaching and leadership. This will also give staff opportunities for external evaluation of their work and to gain further qualifications.
- The curriculum does not meet the needs of all students. The choices for students to study for GCSE examinations have not included a modern foreign language, or the three separate sciences of physics, chemistry and biology, for the last two years. The small size of the sixth form has also limited the options available, although the consortium has helped the range to be larger than it otherwise might have been. The policy of early entry for both English language and mathematics GCSE has prevented some students from reaching their potential.

- The academy uses a small number of local off-site providers to help support students who may not otherwise complete their education. This provision is carefully monitored to ensure students attend and make progress. Those who are currently on a placement have not been attending long enough to judge its effectiveness.
 - There are many opportunities for students to take part in activities beyond lessons. These include both sports and arts, which they enjoy, and opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
 - The Principal has a clear ambition for the academy to carry on improving at a faster rate. Responses from those who completed the staff questionnaires show that they all feel the academy is led well and are proud to work at the academy, where they feel valued.
 - The Staffordshire University Trust supports the academy well. There are clear plans to work closely with the university's education department to bring about improvements to the quality of teaching and to leadership at all levels. The university recognises this support will be mutually beneficial. It is working closely with the academy's specialist areas of sport, health and well-being to help educate, transform and create a more healthy society in the local community.
 - The academy has appropriate systems to check on how well teachers are teaching. Leaders identify areas of strength and aspects which need improving, although these are not always detailed clearly in teachers' formal targets for improvement.
 - The academy has used the pupil premium well to fund an additional member of staff to act as a mentor and to provide one-to-one tuition for eligible individuals. The early evaluations of the additional support for students' reading show some very impressive improvements. The use of these funds and how successful they have been in raising eligible students' achievement are reported appropriately to the governing body.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is strong. The governing body includes members of the Trust who are senior members within the university. Governors challenge the academy to make sure it improves. They check to make sure that the arrangements for safeguarding students meet all current national requirements. They check how well different groups of pupils achieve to identify if any group is doing less well than others and then make sure improvements are put in place. They oversee the annual check on how well teachers are performing, and ensure that teachers who successfully meet their targets are suitably rewarded.
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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	137164
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	399846

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	616
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Richards
Headteacher	David Evans (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01543 512415
Fax number	01543 512441
Email address	principal@staffordshireuniversityacademy.org.uk

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