

Fair Oak Academy

Penkridge Bank Road, Rugeley, WS15 2UE

Inspection dates 23–24 April 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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The clear vision and strong direction given to the academy by senior leaders and the sponsor are leading to sustained and significant improvements in the quality of teaching and students' progress.
- Students achieve well. Progress is particularly strong for those who face barriers to their learning, including those with special educational needs, in public care or known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Academy leaders and staff monitor students' performance closely to identify those individuals and groups who need extra support. The academy uses the additional resources of the pupil premium very smartly to support those most vulnerable to underachievement.
- In Key Stages 3 and 4, students are offered a rich curriculum, which enables them to follow courses well suited to their interests and aspirations. The design element of the curriculum is a particular strength.
- Students are well taught by specialists with good subject knowledge. Classes are well managed and lessons well planned to meet the needs of most individuals and groups. Teachers' marking offers students clear guidance on how to improve.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning. They work well together in teams, take on leadership responsibilities, and readily contribute their views in class or other forums. Most behave responsibly and safely.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The sixth form requires improvement. Achievement in A- and AS-level examinations in 2012 was poor and, while current students make adequate progress overall, there remains too much variation in achievement between courses.
- Students' attainment and progress in science are weaker than in other subjects, both in the sixth form and the main academy.
- Not all teaching matches the best practice in challenging the more-able students, developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, ensuring that students respond to teachers' marking, and setting effective homework.

Information about this inspection

- In the main academy, inspectors observed 22 teachers in 23 lessons. A further 12 lessons were observed in the sixth form. On both sites, inspectors carried out some joint observations with members of the academy’s senior team. Observations of other aspects of the academy’s work were also made, including of activities held as part of the ‘Life and Soul’ day which ran throughout the first day of the inspection. Normal timetables are suspended for all students on such ‘Life and Soul’ days throughout the year to allow them to engage in a programme of personal, social, health, citizenship and religious education.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, governors and school staff, including senior and middle leaders. A discussion was held with the academy sponsor’s director of education, who is also the academy’s attached adviser. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Questionnaire returns from 47 staff were analysed.
- Inspectors took account of 41 responses to the on-line Parent View questionnaire, along with written comments from one parent. Evidence from the academy’s own survey of parents was also examined.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the academy’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

Kerin Jones

Additional Inspector

Susan Tabberer

Additional Inspector

Anne McAvan

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Full report

Information about this school

- Fair Oak Academy is smaller than most other secondary schools. It became an academy in September 2011.
- The academy is sponsored by the Creative Education Academies Trust, whose mission is 'to promote the improvement of educational opportunity for young people in the UK and to enhance the role of design in schools'.
- The academy forms part of the Rugeley Academies, which serve the town of Rugeley, together with its neighbour and federated partner Hagley Park Academy. Both academies share the operation of a small sixth form, the Rugeley Sixth Form Academy, which is located on a separate site about a mile and a half away. All three academies were inspected at the same time.
- The academies have a single leadership team headed by an executive principal, and a single local governing body. Each academy has its own headteacher. The acting executive principal had recently been appointed at the time of the inspection following the retirement of his predecessor.
- Most pupils are White British.
- An average proportion of students are eligible for support from the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government, mainly for students known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after in public care).
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The academy exceeds government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A very small number of students at Key Stage 4 attend Staffordshire College for one day a week for a hairdressing diploma.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' attainment, progress and retention in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring that students who join the sixth form are given the best possible advice and guidance so that they enrol only for courses which fully suit their interests and abilities
 - ensuring that the quality of teaching and the rate of students' progress in the sixth form are monitored and supported with at least as much rigour as they are in the main academy
 - offering activities within and beyond academic subjects which enrich students' experiences, develop their leadership skills and promote their personal development.
- Enable all teaching to match the high standards set in the best lessons, by ensuring that teachers consistently:
 - plan tasks which stretch and challenge the more-able students, without requiring them to complete low-level activities first
 - adapt their questioning so that students are encouraged to give detailed, considered and extended responses, especially in the sixth form
 - make sure that students respond to teachers' marking comments by improving their work
 - enable students to extend their learning beyond the classroom through regular, well-planned homework and, in the near future, use of the academy website and learning platform

- plan opportunities for students to apply and develop their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Improve students' achievement in science, including in the sixth form, through more consistently engaging and inspiring teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the academy with attainment that is broadly average overall, although there are relatively low proportions of higher attainers on entry in all year groups.
- Students' overall attainment by the end of Year 11 is above average, and they make good progress relative to their starting points. The proportion that achieved five GCSEs passes at grades A* to C inclusive of English and mathematics was broadly average in 2012 and is set to improve substantially this year.
- Students in those groups which face specific barriers to their learning made particularly strong progress in their GCSEs in 2012. This was especially the case for those with low attainment when they joined the academy, and those with special educational needs. The small number of students with English as an additional language made excellent progress. Students eligible for support from the pupil premium achieved well in comparison to their peers nationally and markedly 'closed the gap' with other students in the school. Students in all of these groups benefit from well-managed and well-targeted support, and crucially from classroom teachers who take direct responsibility for their progress. Detailed classroom support plans from the learning support team enable teachers to ensure that students in these groups play a full part in lessons and learn well.
- Middle and higher-attaining groups also make generally good progress. In lessons, however, the learning of higher-attaining students is sometimes constrained as they are expected to respond to the same lower-level tasks as everyone else before moving to challenging activities more suited to their abilities.
- In English and mathematics, students' progress compares favourably with that of students nationally. The academy operates an early entry policy in mathematics to allow students extra time for English at GCSE; there is some evidence that this may constrain progress for some middle-attaining groups in mathematics.
- Special reading programmes for students in Years 7 and 8 have been very successful in quickly improving the skills of those with low reading ages, promoting generally good progress for those lower-attaining students in Year 7 who are now supported by the government's 'catch-up premium' funds. However, students do not have enough planned opportunities to apply and develop their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects.
- Students make good progress across a range of subjects including humanities and modern languages. Their work in design-based courses, including art and design, design and technology, and engineering, is often of a high quality; displays of this work throughout the school and especially in the workshops, studios and gallery of the design faculty celebrate students' achievements and stimulate their creativity. Students' attainment and progress in science, however, are too low, and students are not always fully engaged and motivated in their learning in class.
- In the small sixth form, results at A-level and AS-level were low in 2012, and too many students dropped out of courses during the first year of the academy. The academy recognises that at that time there were significant weaknesses in the guidance of students into sixth form courses and in the teaching of some of those courses. Under new leadership, decisive action has been taken to strengthen teaching and improve the monitoring and support for students' progress, so that in most cases students are on track to reach or exceed the results expected of them. There

remain, however, some relative weaknesses in science and business.

The quality of teaching is good

- In the large majority of lessons, including in the sixth form, teaching is good. There are examples of outstanding practice. Teachers are mainly specialists with good subject knowledge.
- Teachers generally plan and manage lessons well. In particular, they make good use of the very practical classroom support plans that they receive from the learning support department to ensure that they adapt their teaching to meet the needs of those who require extra help. Teaching assistants offer effective support in lessons where they are present.
- Teachers distribute questions around classes to ensure the full involvement of all students in class discussions. These questions do not, however, always challenge higher-attaining students to deepen and extend their responses and their thinking, including in the sixth form.
- Lessons are well structured to ensure that students have time working independently or collaboratively to reinforce their learning and develop their skills in solving problems. Teachers set clear objectives for learning in each lesson, and these are often linked to examination or National Curriculum assessment grades and levels. However, teachers do not always make sure that higher-attaining students start off with more challenging tasks than others; they often have to do the same work as others before reaching the more stretching and stimulating exercises.
- Teachers are effective in helping students to assess their own work and that of others, thereby enabling students to reflect on the quality of their work and improve it where necessary. Teachers' marking of students' work is often of a high quality, and clearly sets out 'what went well' and how the work could be 'even better if' certain aspects were improved. Marking is particularly detailed and helpful in English. Teachers do not always ensure that their comments are acted upon by students, though, and this means that the quality and presentation of written work sometimes varies widely for students in the same classes.
- There is some inconsistency between subjects and teachers in the quality, quantity and regularity of homework given. Opportunities for students to learn at home might be further extended by developing the use of the learning platform.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students arrive at the academy punctually and ready to learn. Their good attendance is a mark of their enjoyment of school and its activities. Pastoral managers monitor students' attendance closely. Having identified that the attendance of students eligible for the pupil premium presented some concerns, they have used pupil premium funding to deploy additional support to those students and their families with early signs of success.
- Most students behave well and have a high regard for the safety of themselves and others in the classroom and around the academy. Good relationships prevail between students. Students report that bullying is rare and that staff take such matters seriously. Students have a generally good understanding of different forms of bullying and how to guard against it.
- Behaviour seen in lessons on the inspection was good. Students and a minority of parents expressed the view that this is not always the case, and that a minority of lessons are sometimes subject to low-level disruption. This appears to be partly related to challenging behaviour from some individual students, and also to the relatively large number of lessons

which have been covered by supply teachers recently because of long-term sickness or maternity absence of staff.

- Detailed academy records show an improving picture of behaviour over time and a reducing need for sanctions. Rates of exclusion are low. Students value the academy's reward system and note its impact in promoting good behaviour and positive attitudes.
- Students readily participate in activities in and out of class. They make their views heard through surveys and consultations, although some would like to know more about the work of the school council. They readily take on leadership responsibilities, for example as house captains or prefects, and make a very positive contribution to the smooth running of a very orderly academy.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, ably supported by the senior team, has set out a clear vision for improvement of the academy centred on more ambitious targets for students' progress in all year groups, and the promotion of high-quality teaching. There has been a marked shift in focus from one of getting students across a GCSE grade C threshold in Year 11 to one of ensuring that all groups of students make good progress in all subjects in every year.
- The sponsor has challenged the academy to achieve higher targets, and middle leaders have raised expectations in their subjects. Staff are generally highly positive about the direction of the academy and the support they receive. The vision for academy improvement is, therefore, widely shared and acted upon.
- Leaders make effective use of information about students' progress to inform a clear and honest evaluation of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. This self-evaluation informs action planning which usefully combines the academy's longer-term aims with shorter-term goals for improving provision and outcomes. Detailed analysis of students' progress has enabled academy leaders to shape actions and deploy resources, including the pupil premium, to successfully 'close gaps' in performance between different groups of students.
- Teaching is monitored regularly and supportively, and action put in place to develop teachers' practice in areas of weakness. Teachers' performance is carefully monitored and clearly informs decisions about their progression to upper pay scales. Newly qualified teachers speak very positively of the support they are given and, as a consequence, generally teach well.
- The curriculum offers a very broad choice of courses at Key Stage 4, enabling students to choose between academic, vocational and applied options to suit their interests and aspirations. Students make generally good progress in their vocational courses. Provision for the few students who go off site to train in hairdressing is carefully monitored to assure its quality and safety. At Key Stage 3, an innovative design programme has been introduced by the sponsor to develop students' creativity and skill in art, design and technology, and information and communication technology through projects initiated by the design industry.
- The curriculum for personal, social, health, citizenship and religious education is now delivered through a series of 'Life and Soul' days: these have the advantage of allowing students whole days for extended and active projects or off-site visits, including input from external agencies, but do not always help teachers to take account of students' prior knowledge when planning the activities. Students can take up a range of enrichment activities outside the classroom, with music a particular strength. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is further reinforced by a range of international links with schools abroad.

- In the sixth form, until recently, courses were poorly matched to students' abilities and interests. Teachers visited the academy only to teach lessons before returning to the main sites, creating weaknesses in on-site supervision and study support which allowed some students to drift. New leadership of the sixth form has addressed many of these issues, ensuring that students have support when they need it and that students' progress and teaching quality are regularly monitored and reviewed. Expectations have been raised, although leaders acknowledge that there is some legacy of poor performance still to eradicate. Students still highlight a lack of enrichment opportunities like clubs, sports, artistic and cultural activities that help develop a strong identity within the sixth form, although some are still involved in these activities on the Fair Oak site.
- The structure of the sixth form is planned to change markedly by September 2013. Sixth form subjects on offer are changing to predominantly academic courses, admission requirements have been raised in terms of GCSE grades required, and the site will close this term, moving provision to Hagley Park.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are highly experienced and well informed about the performance of the academy. They have taken action to improve the performance of the sixth form, although they recognise the need for further training in monitoring sixth form performance. Otherwise, they have a very good understanding of performance data, and question the academy's performance robustly in meetings of the full governing body and its committees. They manage resources well, ensuring that, for example, pupil premium funding promotes better achievement for the students it supports. Governors fully scrutinise the academy's records of the performance management of staff, and give well-considered final decisions about whether the performance of teachers and leaders supports their progression to upper pay scales. The governing body has expertise to ensure that procedures to safeguard the welfare and well-being of students and staff are effective and meet requirements. Following the foundation of an academy, the committee structure has evolved through negotiation with the sponsor. Governors recognise the need to ensure that committees establish a regular programme of review of academy policies.

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	137100
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	399836

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	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	832
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Murphy
Headteacher	David Powell (Executive Principal) and Sonia Taylor (headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01889 802440
Fax number	01889 578761
Email address	enquiries@fairoakacademy.org.uk

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