

The Hastings Academy

Rye Road, Hastings, East Sussex, TN35 5DN

Inspection dates 15–16 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	N/A
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students' achievement is improving rapidly.
- Teaching is good and as a result, students throughout the academy are now learning well. This is because teachers are focusing on the particular needs of individuals and groups of students.
- Teachers are keen to continue to develop and refine their skills and the quality of teaching in the academy is improving rapidly.
- Students and their parents value the academy's emphasis on 'behaviour to achieve'. The academy is a safe place. Behaviour is not yet good but it is improving strongly because issues are being addressed well.
- The Principal, senior team and directors of the academy are driving up outcomes for students rapidly and securely. The very high level of trust and respect they are shown by parents and students is entirely justified.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Attendance is still low despite a recent reduction in the proportion of students who are absent often.
- Many students are not yet confident learners. Few can use discussion, and questioning of each other, well enough to support their learning strongly.
- Few students have developed sufficiently sophisticated reading skills to support their learning well. Too few love reading for its own sake.
- Students do not always know how to make best use of good quality marking and feedback to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons, including several jointly with senior staff.
- Inspectors met with senior staff, representatives of the board of directors including representatives from the sponsors, and students.
- The academy’s development planning and self-evaluation documents, policies and safeguarding procedures were scrutinised.
- The 281 responses to Parent View were taken into account.
- The views of the 43 staff who returned questionnaires were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Alan Taylor-Bennett, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Kathy Maddocks	Additional Inspector
Carolyn Steer	Additional Inspector
Gary Kirkley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- It opened on 1 September 2011 as a sponsor-led academy. The main sponsor is the University of Brighton; East Sussex County Council and BT are co-sponsors.
- The academy is federated with St Leonards Academy which was inspected separately but at the same time. The two academies work closely together, sharing some staff and services, under the same board of directors.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs and are supported through school action plus, or with a statement of special educational need, is similar to the national average. The proportion supported at school action is higher than average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is twice the national average. Some students are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The academy serves a community with relatively little ethnic or cultural diversity. Nearly all students are of White British heritage.
- Several students attend part-time at one of a wide range of other local providers, including The Entertainment Workshop in Rye, Plumpton College, Bexhill Skills Centre and Eggtooth.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standard, which sets minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' attendance so that it is at least in line with the national average.
- Ensure that all subjects promote reading, as part of a whole-academy literacy strategy, so that it supports learning strongly, and everyone has the opportunity to develop a love of reading for its own sake.
- Develop strategies to improve students' confidence and resilience as learners, by:
 - giving the development of high-level speaking skills a prominent role in lessons
 - supporting all students to make individual and thoughtful responses to good quality feedback from teachers in written work
 - building in more opportunities in lessons to explore the significance of what they are learning, and to reflect more broadly on its importance for them and their lives.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The achievement of students in all year groups is improving very rapidly. Year 11 students are making progress that is at least in line with national expectations in all key subjects, and better in some. This enables them to catch up on what was generally low attainment when they arrived in Year 7.
- Progress in mathematics in particular has improved dramatically, from being very low for Year 11 last year to being broadly similar to national averages for Year 11 this year. This is because the academy identified the precise reasons for student underperformance, particularly by girls, and put in place a range of effective strategies to address it. These included single-sex teaching groups, and very useful support from the academy's sponsors, The University of Brighton, in providing positive female role-models in mathematics. This very strong trend of improvement in mathematics is evident throughout the academy.
- The academy has also successfully addressed the need to improve the achievement of more able students. For example, the proportion of students likely to obtain the very highest grades at GCSE this summer has increased considerably. This is because of teachers' higher expectations, and a reduction in the number of students following vocational courses, with more doing GCSEs in science, information and communication technology, food studies and physical education. A raft of further opportunities for more able students has provided valuable additional challenges through initiatives such as The Falcons and Villiers Park Scholars individual mentoring scheme.
- The policy for early entry to GCSE has changed considerably over recent years. Its widespread use to prop up low confidence and demonstrate what is possible to younger students has ceased, and it is now used sparingly and appropriately and in ways that ensure that GCSE grades reflect the potential of students, including the most able.
- The academy promotes further and higher education to students assertively. In partnership with its sponsors, all students and their families are encouraged to regard moving on to A levels and other forms of further education and training, and then university, as a natural ambition. This is helping to reduce the number of students who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- The great majority of students show value for their learning and want to do well. They are, however, not confident or resilient learners and relatively few speak up unless prompted, verbalise their ideas clearly or are able to argue a case in a sophisticated manner. Wrong or incomplete answers sometimes confound rather than fascinate, and few students read around a subject and bring ideas and experiences of their own into discussions as a consequence.
- A relatively large proportion of students attend courses elsewhere for part of the week. The impact of this provision on student achievement and well-being is tracked in an exemplary fashion so that the academy can point to a range of individual successes, and outstanding value for money achieved.
- The achievement of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is good. Recent improvements in the leadership of this provision, coupled with the careful attention that students with particular learning needs receive in lessons, means that their progress has accelerated this year.
- Pupil premium funds are used very effectively to support higher levels of achievement for eligible students. For example, there is one-to-one tuition in English and mathematics, behavioural and emotional support such as the Eggtooth project in Year 9, and key-worker and family liaison work to enable close and profitable links between the academy and the parents of students at risk of underachievement. There is evidence that the use of this funding is having a positive impact on students who are eligible for free school meals or who are looked after; these students' average progress in 2012 was better than all students nationally, and the academy's data demonstrate that the gaps in performance in English and mathematics, between those eligible for free school meals and those not, are narrowing.
- Year 7 catch-up premium funding is used well to support the 51 students who achieved below

Level 4 in both English and mathematics at Key Stage 3. It funds small-group intensive support work. This group has made better progress than average; most students have made a whole level of progress in reading already.

The quality of teaching is good

- Much of the teaching in the academy is good. Teachers use the excellent analyses of students' progress, updated frequently, to highlight the need to intervene with specific individuals and groups. Good quality interventions speed up progress because they are timely and well targeted.
- Some of the teaching is outstanding. It involves high quality questioning which probes understanding, the work set being well matched to the needs of individual students, and a lively and exciting atmosphere being created and nurtured. Students particularly value teachers' taking time to explain the ideas that lie around specific issues, and giving time for reflection and consideration. They say that '...the best teachers do this, but not for too long', but that it is not done often enough across all lessons.
- Some teaching requires improvement and a small proportion is inadequate. The academy has effective support and training programmes in place to enable teachers to understand how changes to their approaches can improve the quality of students' learning, and the proportion of good teaching is improving.
- There have been problems staffing some subject areas in the past and some teachers are currently retained on a temporary basis. Staffing is becoming more stable and the impact of changes of teachers is managed well, to limit any adverse impact on students' progress.
- The academy has good strategies in place for improving students' literacy skills. Many teachers make effective use of elements of the overall policy but it is not delivered with sufficient consistency to have high impact. For example, while key words are emphasised and students' spelling and grammar are corrected consistently, strategies to reinforce reading skills are not used in some lessons, and students are not directed often enough to background reading, either as important homework or simply for interest. Opportunities are also sometimes missed to develop students' depth of understanding of a topic by requiring them to use dialogue to support learning, for example in brief presentations, carefully reasoned explanations, and well-managed discussions.
- Students are not always required to respond to the feedback offered to them in their books. The best teaching prioritises this follow-up and evaluates students' responses to previous feedback points the next time their work is marked, but this is not common practice.
- There are many opportunities in lessons to broaden students' understanding of social, spiritual, moral and cultural issues. For example, in Year 10, drama students were seen preparing their own version of 'Twelfth Night' to perform locally and, in an English lesson, students were observed thoroughly enjoying discussing the language used in *Romeo and Juliet*. In both lessons students showed the capacity to reflect the ideas in the plays into their own lives. Chances to do this are not common enough beyond creative and expressive arts subjects and English.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- Students conduct themselves appropriately when moving around the pleasant open spaces of the new academy buildings. They showed patience and understanding during the disruption involved in moving from the old to the new building, and they currently show respect for their new environment and, most importantly, for each other. Students usually behave well in lessons and many show a readiness to learn.
- Behaviour in the academy is improving. There are clear systems to reward good behaviour, and graded 'consequences' follow any instances of poor conduct. Instances of exclusions are reducing and students who show challenging behaviour due to personal circumstances or their particular learning difficulties are supported well.
- The behaviour and safety of students who attend alternative provision off-site is monitored very

well and regular quality assurance visits, and other forms of communication, enable the academy to keep a close eye on their welfare, attendance and punctuality.

- There is some bullying but it is not common. When it happens, it is usually in Years 7–9, and takes the form of unkind words and actions, sometimes via social networking sites or texting. Students are confident that teachers will involve themselves and work with parents in order to support students.
- Students show a keen willingness to show respect for each other and show understanding of the academy's good emphasis on equality of opportunity. Differences, in sexual orientation for example, are tolerated by students rather than valued, however.
- There is some low-level disruption in a few lessons and this slows progress. This is because some staff do not apply the clear discipline guidelines with enough skill. Some students use unacceptable language in their dealings with staff and other students, although this is not common.
- Behaviour is not yet good because attendance is low despite an upward trend in the attendance of the minority who are persistently absent.

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal and her senior staff show passion, determination and vigour in driving up achievement and in ensuring that students are very well cared for. This single-minded approach to obtaining the very best for students is successful because it is translated into clear policies and procedures which are enforced rigorously on a day-by-day basis. This high quality leadership has resulted in significant improvements in many areas of the academy's work this year, and it gives the academy a strong capacity to continue improving.
- Parents show high levels of confidence about the effectiveness of senior staff in leading the academy. The many responses to the Parent View survey demonstrate that they are fully behind the Principal, and value the strength and effectiveness of her leadership.
- The academy's self-evaluation and planning documents show that senior staff have a keen sense of the academy's strengths and its development needs; they are honest about the fact that although it has improved significantly over the last year, important areas of strength are still patchy. For example, some teaching still requires improvement and some good teaching is still becoming securely so, and attendance is still low.
- The progress made by students, especially in the core subjects, has accelerated dramatically this year because teaching is better, and also due to the excellent deployment of resources where they will have most impact. For example, the chances of students obtaining at least a grade C in both English and mathematics is maximised by a combination of very close monitoring of individual student achievement, high levels of accountability of teachers, good curriculum development, and short, sharp intervention to support individuals.
- The leadership and management of the quality of teaching focuses effectively on identifying individual teachers' strengths and areas for improvement, working quickly and supportively with them and then monitoring the positive impact of this work soon afterwards. Senior staff judge the quality of lessons accurately. 'Drop-ins' to lessons are frequent and there is an open-door culture across the academy which encourages staff to share ideas and support each other, and to give and receive constructive challenge.
- Performance management is used well to reward good teaching and for the achievement of ambitious targets, but staff who do not achieve the outcomes required of them do not progress up the pay scale or gain access to the upper pay spine.
- Safeguarding systems are secure, and the good systems in place are used well to minimise risk to students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The board of directors is a group of experienced and astute educationalists, and experts in other areas which are of relevance to the academy's work. The lead sponsors, The University of Brighton, work very closely and effectively with the academy to support it, for example in

mathematics this year. The local authority is a co-sponsor and ensures that the academy maintains close and productive links with other local schools, as well as providing a range of support services. Directors exercise close oversight of the strategic development of the academy and ensure the delivery of high quality provision, but also allow the Principal and her senior team to express their creativity and appetite for innovation. They ensure that the federation with another local academy brings about economies of scale and provides support for improvement through the sharing of staff expertise and specialist knowledge. Directors continually update their own knowledge and skills, for example in keeping themselves well informed about the nature of performance data and its use in academy improvement, and how comparisons of the performance and the efficiency of the academy with other similar schools can point the way to further improvements. Directors have an excellent understanding of how the use of the pupil and Year 7 catch-up premium is closing achievement gaps, and use the academy's well-developed systems to ensure that provision is regularly evaluated and that value for money is maximised. Their knowledge of the quality of teaching is thorough and directors ensure that good teaching is rewarded, but that pay increases are only awarded to those who satisfy the requirements of the performance management policy. Directors have considerable financial expertise and have steered the academy superbly through the complexities of implementing its recent new building plan. Links with the local community are vibrant because of the high levels of commitment of the sponsors and all directors to the needs of local people and the town of Hastings. The local advisory body serves to give a voice to local people to maintain these very high quality links.

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	136401
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	399863

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	738
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Professor Julian Crampton
Principal	Theresa Phillips
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01424 711950
Fax number	N/A
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