

Stephenson Academy

Crosslands, Stantonbury, Milton Keynes, MK14 6AX

Inspection dates 2–3 July 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 | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Too few students are making as much progress as possible in the more academic subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Not enough teaching is good or better because teachers do not always check what students already know or find out where they have gaps in their understanding so that they can adapt the lesson accordingly.
- In some lessons, teachers do not give students enough time to think or sufficient challenge to solve problems for themselves.
- This term, additional support to increase students' progress in reading and writing has been revised but information to check how well this is working is not yet available for leaders.
- Mathematic calculations are not taught in a consistent way across the curriculum.

The school has the following strengths:

- Effective systems and leadership have helped the academy to improve rapidly since it opened just over a year ago. Senior leaders have established a positive culture so that all staff, many of whom have been at the academy for less than a year, believe all students can succeed and make better progress.
- The focus on ensuring Year 11 students gain higher qualifications has helped to make up for their previous slow progress.
- Teaching, although not yet good, is rapidly improving as a result of good monitoring and effective feedback from the deputy principal.
- The good range of additional support helps most students to become better engaged in learning and to improve their behaviour.
- Governors monitor the effectiveness of the academy and the work of staff well by looking at improvements in students' attainment and behaviour. As more information is becoming available, they are beginning to be able to check how well the academy is performing by looking at the numbers of students making good or better progress in both learning and behaviour.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 15 lessons or parts of these lessons to look at teaching and learning. Many of these were observed jointly with the Principal or deputy principal for teaching and learning. The inspector also carried out further short visits to a range of lessons with the deputy principal for inclusion and behaviour to look at behaviour and attendance in lessons across the academy.
- Other observations included break and lunchtimes, as well as the management of behaviour during lesson changes.
- Discussions were held informally with students and the inspector met with two Year 11 students who had returned to the academy for a visit. The inspector held meetings with the Principal and other members of the senior leadership team, staff, and three members of the governing body, who are also trustees of the academy.
- The inspector looked at students' work and a range of documents, including students' progress data, results of any examinations and other qualifications, the academy's self-evaluation, its monitoring of teaching, safeguarding information, minutes of meetings of the governing body, attendance and behaviour data, and reports from external visitors. She also looked in detail at five case studies.
- There were three responses to the online Parent View survey. The inspector took into account written communication sent into the academy. She also carried out phone calls with parents and carers to seek their views and managed to speak to three.
- The inspector was unable to evaluate the sixth form because so far only one student has studied at the academy after the age of 16.

Inspection team

Janet Thompson, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a small special academy for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- At the time of the inspection, there were five students in Year 11 and one student in the sixth form, none of whom were at the academy during the inspection.
- Eight students in Year 8 started at the academy on the day prior to the inspection. This was part of the transition arrangements for the new school year.
- The proportion of students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding is high. This is extra government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families. There are only two girls at the academy.
- The vast majority of students are from Milton Keynes but a growing number are travelling from nearby local authorities. Nearly all students are White British.
- The sponsor-led academy opened in April 2012 and has had significant changes in staff since September 2012. Plans are in place to federate the Stephenson Academy with The Bridge Alternative Provision Academy so that both are part of the Stephenson Trust.
- The academy does not use any alternative providers for education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, specifically in Years 9 and 10, so that more students make faster progress across all subjects, including English, mathematics and science, by:
 - making sure teachers use information about what students already know and any gaps in their learning so that they provide more challenging work for students working at different levels
 - making sure all teachers give students enough time to think in response to a question, and time and opportunities to solve problems and work things out for themselves
 - ensuring all lessons build upon what interests and motivates students to learn.
- Establish a clear way to support staff so that they teach mathematics calculations consistently, building on the students' prior learning and experiences.
- As more information becomes available, make sure all evaluation is based upon the progress made by different students in relation to the time they have been at the academy, and ensure the analysis of progress made by different groups, where these are small, is built upon each year.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- An increasing number of students are making the progress that is expected of them but few are making the rate of progress necessary to ensure they achieve well, especially in English and mathematics.
- The progress students make in lessons is variable. In some, students make good progress. This happens most frequently when learning is practical and in the vocational subjects. In other lessons, there is not enough challenge to make sure they are learning as much as possible or to help them apply their learning in different situations.
- The progress made by Year 11 students over this academic year has been good, helping to address slow progress in previous years. This has made sure they are all on track to gain suitable qualifications, giving them better opportunities for the next steps in education, employment or training.
- All students in Year 11 are on track to attain at least five qualifications including English, mathematics and science as well as some strong success in gaining vocational qualifications, such as motor vehicle maintenance and construction. The majority of these students are eligible for pupil premium funding.
- As a result of checking carefully how well students are learning, there have been recent changes to the additional help on offer. This is helping to tackle any inequalities in the progress made by different students. Those students who struggle to read and write have been given additional support, some of which is funded through the pupil premium. Most students are positive about the additional support and feel it is helping them improve their skills. Early signs suggest it is helping to accelerate the progress they make but there is not enough information available yet to check how well the support is working over time.
- The progress and attainment of students in receipt of additional funding is similar to that of other students at the academy. The students who learn least are the few who have very poor attendance.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Not enough teaching, particularly in the more academic subjects, is good or better. The quality is improving rapidly as teachers are being supported to refine their skills but they do not always make sure there are enough different levels of work so that every student is challenged appropriately.
- When learning is most effective, teachers have high expectations about behaviour and learning. They adapt the lesson as they find out what students know or do not know. The teachers in these lessons use questions carefully, make sure students have time to think and ask them to explain their answers fully.
- When teachers make sure activities are practical, interesting to the students and include an element of problem solving or challenge, students usually make good progress. In an excellent example during the inspection, students were given different types of work within the motor vehicle workshop; some were refining specific skills while others were learning how to diagnose a fault and then take the necessary steps to put it right. All were focused on improving their knowledge and skills, and the teacher made sure they were given enough guidance but also had to work things out for themselves.
- Students have not always been required to produce enough work at the right levels for their capability. This has improved as the year has progressed. Later work shows increased expectations across subjects and year groups. This, alongside better marking, helps students know what to concentrate on so that future work is even better.
- The teaching of reading and writing is becoming more consistent across the subjects. Some students are keen readers and are able to talk about books and explain their preferences. Most

use suitable approaches to read unfamiliar words.

- Many students who find reading difficult are effectively encouraged by having plenty of opportunities to read in different subjects, alongside receiving additional support at separate times. Some are confident to read to their classmates.
- Not all staff are aware of how to teach mathematics in a consistent way to build upon students' prior learning, and there are some missed opportunities to help students use mathematics in different situations.
- Teachers have good ideas that they bring into a variety of lessons to help develop students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. For example, a topical news story from China was used to stimulate discussion at tutor time, and a book used in English prompted discussion about refugees and the freedom of speech.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The majority of students make good progress in improving their behaviour during their time at the academy. There are some good instances of students working as a team; for example, in art when they created a stop-motion film and cooperated with each other to develop ideas and find solutions.
- Expectations of behaviour are usually applied consistently and students who struggle to meet these are given suitable support from staff. Most parents and carers who spoke to or contacted the inspector were complimentary about the support the academy is offering their child and pleased with the progress their child is making.
- A few students find it difficult to meet expectations for behaviour and the academy has introduced some intensive additional support, which is beginning to make a difference. Leaders have successfully reduced exclusions so that fewer students receive them and those that do are out of the academy for less time. Students receive work to complete when not at school. However, the academy still uses exclusions too frequently for a very few students with the most challenging behaviour. Some parents and carers also raised a concern about the frequent use of exclusion.
- Students acknowledge that they are given good support to help them improve their behaviour. They also report that staff take swift action when any bullying takes place. Records show that staff are alert to any language used to hurt or discriminate against any group of people because of their race, gender, sexuality or disabilities. Action taken is usually effective, and students' understanding of what is inappropriate and discriminatory behaviour is further developed through personal, social and health education lessons.
- Staff and governors are monitoring the well-being of the girls at the academy, recognising their additional vulnerability by being a very small minority.
- Attendance has improved and although it is still low overall, an increasing number of students are attending more frequently than before. The academy has taken many effective actions to raise attendance but there are still a very few students who do not attend frequently enough and make less progress than other students.

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal and deputy principals have effectively driven rapid improvement at the academy so that an increasing proportion of students are being taught well and are achieving more than they have in the past.
- Detailed feedback to staff about their teaching is helping them to improve and action supported by the governors has been taken to tackle staff performance that is not good enough.
- Leaders effectively check how well they are doing by looking at the behaviour and learning of students. Detailed reviews of different elements of the academy's work have helped to lead effective action, for example, to improve safeguarding arrangements so that they now meet

requirements.

- Leaders check how many students make the expected progress or more. This information has been used well to change and shape some aspects of provision, including, for example, additional behaviour and literacy support. Pupil premium funding has been used for these aspects of support as well as giving all students equal access to a range of curriculum opportunities to broaden their experiences. This additional funding is helping the academy to tackle discrimination and make sure students who are at risk of underachieving learn more.
- Regular meetings make sure teachers have a shared understanding about the levels at which each student is working. Staff are beginning to do this by working together within the academy and working with other colleagues from different schools.
- The curriculum has been well planned to provide a mix of subjects, including English, mathematics and science alongside vocational options, for example, in catering, motor vehicles and construction.
- Planning for teaching reading and writing across the curriculum is helping to improve the progress students make in these areas. Training for staff so that they teach mathematics consistently in different subjects is not in place.
- The girls comment that they would prefer to learn separately from the boys in physical education and personal, social and health education. The academy acknowledges that these adaptations would be supportive and help the girls gain more confidence in these areas.
- The academy staff strive to work cooperatively with parents and carers, many of whom were very positive about the academy and the rapid rate of improvement since it opened. They acknowledge the improvements, although a few feel there is still more to do.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors have given a good level of support and challenge to the academy. They are familiar with the strengths of the provision and where improvements are still required.
 - They have established high expectations for students' attainment and improving behaviour. They have taken decisive action to help drive improvement, including improving safeguarding and staff performance.
 - They have agreed to changes in the use of the pupil premium funding so that there is better support to help improve students' reading and writing. These changes are recent and although there are early signs that it is helping to improve progress there is not enough information yet to evaluate how effective the support has been over time.
 - Visits to the academy are becoming more commonplace, and clear roles and responsibilities help to ensure visits are focused and informative for the appropriate sub-committees.
 - Performance is effectively managed by looking at the attainment and improvements in behaviour of students at the academy. Until recently, there has not been enough information to analyse critically the rates of progress for different groups of students in relation to their starting points and time at the academy.

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

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| Unique reference number | 138253 |
| Local authority | Milton Keynes |
| Inspection number | 406768 |

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

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|---|------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Academy sponsor-led |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 13–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Boys |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 42 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 1 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Sandra Clark |
| Principal | Neil Barrett |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Telephone number | 01908 313903 |
| Fax number | 01908 221195 |
| Email address | reception@stephensonacademy.org.uk |

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