

# University Academy of Birkenhead

Park Road South, Birkenhead, Wirral, CH43 4UY

**Inspection dates** 9–10 July 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
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

- Too many students do not achieve to their potential. Achievement requires further and more rapid improvement, particularly at GCSE level and in English.
- There remain significant achievement gaps between different groups of students. In particular, those students known to be eligible for free school meals are not making the progress that they should be.
- Too much teaching lacks sufficient planning, variety and challenge. In particular, too much teaching in English requires improvement.
- Outstanding practice is not sufficiently shared to enable improvement in weaker classes.
- Low-level disruptive behaviour by students limits learning in some classes.
- Attendance is low.
- Middle managers are not focused sufficiently on the quality of teaching and learning and student behaviour within their areas of responsibility.

### The school has the following strengths

- New senior leadership has made an impact in creating a better focus on building an aspirational and improvement academy culture. Middle leaders and staff strongly support this new focus.
- New and more effective systems for tracking and monitoring students' progress have been introduced and are demonstrating some initial impact in raising achievement.
- There is now a strong foundation of good and outstanding teaching within the academy, especially in science and mathematics.
- New leadership has increased staff accountability. A fair but tough approach to performance management has been established.
- Governance is clearly focused on raising achievement.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons taught by 37 different teachers. Two of the observations were conducted with members of the senior leadership team.
- Three groups of students met with inspectors. Discussions were held with school staff, including senior leaders, heads of departments, teachers and representatives of the governing body. Inspectors observed students' behaviour around the site at social times.
- Inspectors looked at responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They analysed 14 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors read a range of documents including the academy's self-evaluation, improvement and development plans, monitoring reports, behaviour logs and records in relation to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Patrick Geraghty, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jo Morgan	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christine Addison	Additional Inspector
Derek Barnes	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The academy was formed from two predecessor schools in January 2011 and has approximately 800 students.
- The academy has five sponsors. The lead sponsor is the University of Chester in partnership with the University of Liverpool, Birkenhead Sixth Form College, Wirral Metropolitan College and Wirral Borough Council.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is well above average.
- A much-lower-than-average proportion of students are of minority ethnic heritage.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is above average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- In 2012 the academy fell below the government's floor targets, which set the minimum expected for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy has been through turbulent times between 2011 and 2012 with the resignation of the academy's first Principal and deputy principal. Issues coalesced around leadership and management and the difficulty in establishing a climate and momentum through which rapid improvements across the provision could be achieved. Staff morale deteriorated. A new permanent Principal took up post in June 2012, becoming the fifth academy Principal in the academic year 2011/12.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that a greater proportion is at least good, by:
  - making sure that learning tasks are challenging and engage students and that student tracking data is used in all lessons to inform lesson planning
  - using questioning more effectively to challenge and engage students so that they have opportunities to develop their reasoning and extend their thinking
  - providing greater opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills
  - promoting the sharing of the best practice so that all may aspire to good or better teaching.
  - ensuring that all teaching in English is consistently good.
- Continue to raise and accelerate achievement by:
  - ensuring that the momentum for improvement in science and mathematics is maintained and greatly accelerated in English
  - closing the gap in achievement between different groups of students, and especially those known to be eligible for free school meals
  - embedding high aspirations across all subjects and classes
  - improving teaching in weaker-performing classes and subjects in order to achieve better outcomes for students
  - ensuring that feedback and marking are regular and informative and support students in their next steps in learning
  - improving attendance rates more rapidly and ensuring that current improvement trends in attendance are fully embedded and sustained.

■ Eradicate persistent low-level disruption in lessons by:

- making sure the academy’s expectations of behaviour are clear to all staff and students, and that rewards and sanctions are applied consistently by all staff
- increasing students’ self-esteem, verbal confidence and skills in literacy, and their understanding of how to learn
- ensuring that students support, and are more fully involved in, the building of an aspirational and improvement culture.

■ Improve the impact of the academy’s leaders by:

- ensuring that self-evaluation is sharper and clearly establishes the key priorities for improvement and charts the journey to achieving them
- ensuring that middle managers have greater responsibility for improving teaching and learning and student behaviour within their areas, and establishing clear targets for them that are specific, time-related and regularly monitored
- reviewing approaches to teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 so as to better enable the embedding of literacy and numeracy skills
- further developing work with external partners so as to embed best practice from within the wider sector.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement. Too many students do not achieve to their potential; this has been a historic issue for the academy. In 2011/12 pass rates at GCSE (five A\*- C grades including English and mathematics) were below government floor targets and national averages.
- Most recent academy progress data and results from examinations already taken and marked indicate that there will be a significant improvement at GCSE (five A\*- C grades including English and mathematics) this year. Good progress is made on BTEC courses because of high-quality teaching and good course planning.
- Achievement in mathematics is improving and students are making better progress. Recent modular results in mathematics indicate a significant improvement in pass rates. Improvement in English is currently less marked. In too many lessons observed in English, students made less than expected progress. Progress in science is good.
- More effective monitoring, tracking and intervention systems are enabling a more productive focus on tackling underperformance and providing appropriate interventions. Lower-attaining students, including those supported through school action and school action plus and those known to be supported by the pupil premium, are making better progress. The academy has established effective systems to target those students for additional support.
- Gaps in attainment between different groups of students are narrowing. The gaps between students known to be entitled to free schools meals and their peers have narrowed over the last year but still remain too wide.
- The most able students receive insufficient challenge to enable them to achieve to their potential and to excel. Too many lessons were dull and able students were not sufficiently stretched or given high-quality extension work. A strong aspirational culture is not sufficiently embedded across the academy.
- More effective intervention strategies are beginning to tackle low literacy levels at entry. Reading ages in Years 7 and 8 are improving, with students making better progress. However, there remains far too much inconsistency within and across subjects in the application of the academy's literacy and numeracy strategies.
- The use of early entry for GCSE English and mathematics is considered carefully by the academy. Those students who take early entry but do not achieve the highest grades are given the opportunity to continue to study and, at a later date, resit the paper.
- The academy promotes a strong focus on extra-curricular activities to support students in their academic endeavours. Students value these opportunities and there is a strong take-up in such areas as music. However, further work is necessary to widen the range of programmes to assist students to raise their educational and life-long aspirations.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching and learning require improvement. While the quality of teaching has improved, there continue to be too many inconsistencies in quality between and within subjects. Inspectors observed too much variation across provision, and particularly in English.
- Where teaching was good, students were engaged in learning. In these lessons students worked independently and supported each other. Lessons were well planned so as to support the learning needs of all students. Students thrived in these stimulating and challenging learning environments and, consequently, made good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Science teaching was consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Science lessons were characterised by excellent planning, high expectations, challenging investigations and activities and well-focused, cooperative learning. Activities are planned to encourage cooperative

engagement and independence and responsibility in learning.

- In less well planned lessons students made limited progress. In these lessons activities did not match the learning needs of students. Low-level disruption too often impeded progress and was not consistently challenged by teachers. Too much teacher-led activity prevented students from actively participating in their learning and developing independent learning skills.
- In weak lessons extension activities and challenge, particularly for the more-able students, were lacking and, consequently, too often students went off task. Teachers dominated and students were too passive. Questioning was shallow and not enough students made expected progress. In these sessions lesson planning to inform on an appropriate range of activities was poor and opportunities for students to reflect on learning limited.
- While too much teaching is dull and offers insufficient challenge and motivation to students, the academy has a critical mass of good and excellent teaching that can help to promote the spreading of the best practice. Outstanding practice was observed in science, mathematics and physical education. The academy acknowledges the need to use this good and better practice more productively to promote excellence across all provision.
- There is too much inconsistency in the quality of marking. In too many lessons marking did not give pointers to the next steps to improvement. There was little evidence of teacher follow-up to assess improvement and chart students' progress. In too many lessons marking was neither regular nor informative. Good and developmental marking was observed in science and mathematics.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils

### require improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Too much low-level disruptive behaviour in class impacts upon learning. Too many students are not sufficiently controlling their behaviour nor fully understanding the impact of their behaviour on the learning of others.
- In too many lessons teachers do not apply the academy's behaviour policy. A strong approach to improving behaviour is in place with the pastoral team and consistency of approach is growing. The academy recognises that further work needs to be done so that low-level disruptive behaviour in class is eradicated. In doing this the academy needs to enlist greater student ownership of the aspirational and improvement culture academy leaders are seeking to embed.
- Behaviour over time has improved and this was confirmed in discussions with students. Students' attitudes to learning are at their best when teaching is engaging and relevant. Students can behave well when learning matches their needs and activities are challenging and well planned.
- Attendance is low. However, there are indicators of improvement this year as a result of highly focused strategies and initiatives. Attendance is improving but not at a sufficiently rapid rate. Punctuality remains a priority for the academy. Exclusion rates have declined.
- Students feel safe. They have a good understanding of safety concerning their own health and well-being because these aspects are covered in the curriculum and pastoral system. Students have a comprehensive knowledge of e-safety.
- Bullying rates are low. Incidents are tackled robustly and rapidly. Students and parents recognise that behaviour has improved, but there remains a minority who perceive behaviour to be less than good. Spiritual and cultural issues at both a personal and global level are increasingly well covered.

### The leadership and management

### require improvement

- The academy has been through challenging times during which it has underperformed. The new academy leadership has been in place since June 2012 and brought a period of stability. The academy requires improvement because there has been too little time to embed fully the changes promoted by the new leadership.
- The new Principal has brought a clear improvement agenda. Senior and middle management

strongly support his strategy for accelerated improvement and change. Despite significant redundancies over the last year, staff feel a stronger sense of purpose and direction.

- Effective tracking and monitoring systems are leading to better-focused intervention at both key stages. Data are used more effectively at all levels to evaluate students' progress.
- Self-evaluation, while critical and accurate in parts, is insufficiently focused on the key priorities that will enable more rapid improvement. Key imperatives are lost in a sea of priorities rather than forming a highly focused roadmap for improvement.
- Middle managers are developing a better understanding of the academy's weaknesses and the means and ways by which they can tackle these within their areas of responsibility. However, they still need to accept and be given greater responsibility for improving teaching and learning and students' behaviour within their areas.
- Most recent school data indicate that standards and achievement are beginning to improve. Pupil premium funding is being used and targeted more effectively to impact on students' outcomes, behaviour and attendance. However, this is at too early a stage to judge its impact.
- There is an improved performance management system that has a stronger focus on rewarding best practice. Performance management is increasingly used to support and challenge teachers whose work has been judged as weak. The academy recognises the need to use more effectively the best practice in teaching and learning in order to promote better teaching across all provision.
- The curriculum continues to be restructured to better meet the needs of all students. The introduction of an accelerated reading programme has placed a stronger focus on literacy skills. There remains too much variability in the implementation of the academy's literacy and numeracy focus across all provision.
- The academy is placing a strong focus on equality of opportunity in its curriculum and evolving support structures. However, gaps in achievement between groups of students remain too large.
- Parents are being engaged to play a greater role in the academy. The academy is beginning to develop partnerships to enhance provision but accepts that this requires further acceleration.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors have also been on a journey through the recent traumatic times for the academy. A new Chair was appointed at the start of the academic year. Governors strongly support the present leadership and its strategic vision. They have an accurate view of the academy's strengths and areas for further improvement. They have a strong recognition of the importance of performance management and the need to reward and promote the best teaching and practice. Governors are well informed on initiatives such as the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up strategy. Sponsors are both supportive and regularly involved with the academy. Statutory duties are undertaken effectively and safeguarding requirements are fully met.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136411
<b>Local authority</b>	Wirral
<b>Inspection number</b>	399827

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	807
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Cracknell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Garaint Parry
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 6521574
<b>Fax number</b>	0151 6536760
<b>Email address</b>	parryg@uabirkenhead.org

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