

# Bedford Academy

Mile Road, Bedford, MK42 9TR

**Inspection dates** 17–18 July 2013

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>   | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected |          |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------|
|                                | This inspection:     | <b>Good</b>              | <b>2</b> |
| Achievement of pupils          |                      | Good                     | 2        |
| Quality of teaching            |                      | Good                     | 2        |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils |                      | Good                     | 2        |
| Leadership and management      |                      | Outstanding              | 1        |

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The Principal, ably supported by a strong team of governors and senior and middle leaders, has steered the academy's development with great skill and vision.
- Students make good progress across all year groups and in most subjects, often from low starting points. Achievement in mathematics is particularly strong.
- Teaching is usually good and often outstanding.
- The students' impeccable behaviour and positive attitudes to learning are striking features of the academy, and contribute well to their good achievement.
- The academy's promotion of students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent. Students get on well together and bullying is rare.
- The sixth form is good. Sixth-form students achieve well, and exceptionally well in some subjects.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards are rising, but attainment remains below the national figures at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Aspects of the academy's work, such as promoting literacy across the curriculum, need to become embedded, particularly when students are admitted into Years 7 and 8.
- Teachers' rigid adherence to lesson planning sometimes hampers the pace of learning and occasionally discourages students from deepening their understanding and extending their knowledge.

## Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- Inspectors observed 46 lessons, taught by 43 different teachers, many of which were observed jointly with the senior leaders.
- A range of documentation was analysed, including that relating to safeguarding, students' progress, attendance, exclusions, the academy's self-evaluation and its systems for managing teachers' performance and improving teaching and learning.
- Too few parents had responded to the online Parent View survey for the results to be displayed, but inspectors took account of parental responses to its own survey, collated by the academy.
- Inspectors took account of 30 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Discussions were held with the Principal, nominated staff, several groups of students, and three representatives from the Academy Trust, including the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body.

## Inspection team

|                              |                         |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Paul Brooker, Lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| David Davies                 | Additional Inspector    |
| Carol Worthington            | Additional Inspector    |
| Christine Murrell            | Additional Inspector    |

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Bedford Academy opened in September 2010 in the accommodation of its predecessor school, and moved into its new building in November 2012, with work due to finish this summer.
- It is smaller than the average-sized secondary school, but will expand when students are admitted into Years 7 and 8 in September 2014, making it an 11-18 academy.
- Around half of students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government to support students, including those eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care), which is significantly higher than average.
- There are significantly more students from minority ethnic backgrounds than in most schools. The largest group is of Bangladeshi origin.
- For almost 40% of students, English is an additional language, which is significantly higher than average. Students who are new arrivals to the United Kingdom, mostly from the European Union, are often at an early stage of language acquisition.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well below the national average, as are the proportions supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Fifty-one students in Years 10 and 11 have attended alternative provision (education provided by other schools or colleges) this year. Most follow courses at Bedford College, although a small number attend one of four other local providers.
- The academy makes early GCSE entries in mathematics.
- The timetable is longer than normal, with four 90 minute lessons per day, totalling 30 hours taught time each week, in addition to the enrichment sessions provided for students at the end of each day. Year 9 lessons, and core subjects in Key Stage 4, are taught in single-sex classes.
- The academy meets government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The academy is sponsored by The Harpur Trust and Bedford College and specialises in science and technology.

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

- Embed the strategies that are already in place to raise standards in literacy, particularly when Year 7 and Year 8 students arrive, so that attainment at GCSE matches and exceeds the national figures, particularly the higher A\* and A grades.
- Strengthen teaching so that more is outstanding by ensuring that:
  - work is suitably difficult, particularly for the most able students, and for in girls in mathematics and science lessons
  - teachers are confident to respond flexibly to explore issues in depth when they arise
  - lessons start briskly and with greater variety, so that learning is always eagerly anticipated.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well across most subjects and in each key stage. Unexpectedly low results in English undermined the academy's GCSE headline results in 2012, but the academy's detailed tracking data show that students make rates of progress that are better than those found nationally in both English and mathematics. This is because the current Year 11 cohort is the first to benefit from three years at the academy, with specifically-targeted support to boost attainment in English and mathematics.
- Provision in English was a key focus of this inspection, and evidence scrutinised confirms that students of all abilities make good progress in reading and writing, and that standards in English are rising securely. Good learning and progress were observed in English lessons and confirmed from scrutinies of students' work over time. Literacy is well supported across other subjects.
- There is no marked difference in the achievement of different groups of students. Students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding, disabled students and those who have special educational needs all achieve well. Students who speak English as an additional language, and students of Bangladeshi heritage, make particularly good progress.
- Students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding make better progress than found nationally. In 2012, the proportion of students achieving at least five higher grade GCSEs (including English and mathematics) was 2% lower for the academy's 'pupil premium' students compared with their classmates. This gap has now closed.
- The academy recognises that standards need to increase, and that improving students' literacy is central to this ambition. The systematic approach to teaching reading and writing, from the moment that students start in Year 9, combined with carefully-targeted support to promote these skills, is strengthening students' literacy.
- The academy makes excellent use of its data tracking system to support and accelerate students' progress. For example, careful analysis of progress in mathematics has enabled the academy to use early GCSE entry to secure the highest possible grades for students.
- Sixth form students make good progress across most subjects, including academic and vocational options.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Lessons are carefully planned, following an agreed structure, with good resources and a variety of different activities. Teachers work hard to nurture students' positive attitudes and good work habits. They foster good relationships and a positive climate for learning, so that students are confident to offer answers and work hard.
- In general, teachers use the extended lesson time to good effect by planning a range of activities that present opportunities for students. Assessment is used exceptionally well to drive improvement. Teachers know the capabilities of their students and the individual support they each need. Academic targets are consequently ambitious, and any potential impediments to good progress are addressed.
- Marking is a notable strength because the academy's expectations are high. Teachers are

precise about what has been achieved and what can be improved, and students respond to the guidance they are given.

- The quality of provision has strengthened since the academy opened. Weaknesses have been addressed, so that most lessons are good or better. However, some lessons require improvement, for example when the planned activities are not demanding enough for the more-able students. In a few lessons teachers missed opportunities to extend or deepen discussion because they were rather too preoccupied with sticking to their plan. The pace of learning is sometimes rather leisurely, particularly at the start of a session, for example, in some mathematics and science lessons taught to groups of girls.
- In the best lessons, the quality of learning is excellent because teachers make all the students work hard from start to finish. Some teachers present activities as 'challenges', so that tasks are sharply focused and time-limited. Students rise to these challenges when teachers build their confidence with skilful questioning and gentle encouragement.
- Teaching assistants are well deployed, booster sessions are provided after school and specific support for students with weak literacy is very well delivered.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Students respond to the academy's high expectations and behave very well. The environment is friendly, but purposeful, and students say that they feel well supported and completely safe. The academy specifically fosters the personal qualities of 'grit, zest, optimism, social intelligence, gratitude, curiosity and self-control', which combine to promote well-mannered and considerate young adults.
- Behaviour was consistently good in all lessons observed during the inspection, and stepped sanctions are rarely used. Staff and students say that this is typical. Students follow the expected routines: they settle quickly, comply with teachers' expectations, and sustain their concentration well, even in heat wave conditions! Their behaviour in assembly was impeccable.
- The students' attitudes to learning are good. They support one another and work well together in groups. Most take care with their work and are motivated by the academy's rewards. In some lessons students are rather passive, but this tends to reflect the teaching which does not always present activities to engage the students actively in each group.
- Students are aware of different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and say that it is very rare. This is partly because the break times are staggered for different year groups, so that social times are relaxing and harmonious, but mainly due to the way that the academy promotes students' positive values. Students are encouraged to value one another's qualities and differences, and avoid derogatory language, including the use of homophobic or racist language.
- Students develop personal qualities that prepare them well for the next stage of their education and later life. They talk proudly about their academy and confidently about their own achievements and aspirations. Attendance has risen steeply since the academy opened, and is above the national average.

### **The leadership and management are outstanding**

- The Principal's down-to-earth leadership is impressive. She makes her expectations crystal clear and leads by example to drive improvement. The academy is building a very strong leadership

team, including governors, which shares the same high aspirations for its students.

- Equality of opportunity and ambition are at the heart of the academy's endeavour, but this is only achieved through the forensic analysis of information about students. Every student is known: how well they are doing, what they could attain and any personal circumstances that might impact on their achievement or well-being. The use of students' progress data also sensibly underpins evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and the performance management of staff.
- The impact of the work of senior and middle leaders can be seen in the increasing proportion of good or better teaching. Leaders are relentless in seeking ways to strengthen teaching and raise standards, and are always seeking ways to meet students' individual needs. The academy has a good system of performance management, underpinned by regular checks on the quality of teaching and marking, and students' examination results. Underperformance is tackled with suitable support and challenge.
- The staff profile is comparatively youthful, and the academy has been highly successful in nurturing the skills of its new teachers, including a programme for newly qualified teachers that is judged to be exemplary. Professional development for staff is well structured and sharply focused. Fewer than one in five teachers are on the upper pay scale, but their salary progression is tied to successful achievement of targets for their performance.
- The marked increase in attendance at parents' evenings reflects the academy's success in positively engaging parents and carers. The academy has developed a range of strategies to improve communication, including a parent forum, and works hard to induct new parents as well as new students. Its own surveys show that parents are highly positive about the academy.
- The curriculum is well structured to meet the needs and aspirations of the students, particularly in regard to literacy. The extended curriculum is very impressive, with a wide range and variety of extension and enrichment activities provided each day, including sport, music and creative arts. Although optional, the students' participation is closely monitored so that everyone is encouraged to get involved.
- Students in alternative provision can choose from a wide range of different courses, with levels of accreditation that are matched to their particular needs. They attend regularly and achieve well; importantly, almost every student in Year 11 has progressed onto a college course or has already secured training or employment.
- The academy draws well on its multi-faith and multi-cultural richness to promote exceptionally well the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including in assemblies and in lessons. Teachers are aware of their responsibilities; they are alert to encouraging positive attitudes and challenging inappropriate stances. They encourage students to be reflective and often take the opportunity to discuss wider issues, such as restorative justice, diversity and gender.
- The additional government funding provided through the pupil premium has been carefully allocated to secure the full engagement and better achievement of targeted students. The academy groups its expenditure under four headings: intervention, support, enrichment and training. Much is assigned to salary costs of key staff, but expenditure is also sensibly allocated to support intervention programmes and trips and visits ensure that students have equal access to wider enrichment opportunities.
- The sponsors have played a significant role in the strategic development of the academy through

the board of governors, as well as through capital funding for proposed new developments. Partnerships with the College and the Harpur Trust schools provide a broader curriculum and wider experiences for students, such as Combined Cadet Force and sixth-form debates.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are well-informed and use their detailed knowledge to provide suitable support and challenge, as necessary. They keep up to date with developments and have a good grasp of performance data, so are able to hold senior leaders to account by asking timely and searching questions.
- The governing body understands its responsibilities in regard to safeguarding and ensures that arrangements meet all statutory requirements. Governors know about the quality of teaching, how performance management is used to strengthen teaching, and how effectively the funding from pupil premium is allocated.

## 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> | 136085  |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Bedford |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 399771  |

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>                    | 13–18                     |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                       | Mixed                     |
| <b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>     | Mixed                     |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>    | 743                       |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b> | 142                       |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                  | The governing body        |
| <b>Chair</b>                                  | Mervyn Weeden             |
| <b>Principal</b>                              | Claire Smith              |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                       | 01234 301500              |
| <b>Fax number</b>                             | 01234 301501              |
| <b>Email address</b>                          | info@bedfordacademy.co.uk |

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