

# Grace Academy Darlaston

Herberts Park Road, Wednesbury, Walsall, WS10 8QJ

**Inspection dates** 16–17 July 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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:

- The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE A\* to C grades has not improved rapidly enough. The school has not met the government’s floor targets.
- The progress of boys has been slower than that of other students in the school. While reading skills are being supported well, students’ ability to write effectively needs to be developed.
- Not enough teaching is good or better. Weak teaching in a small number of lessons means that not all students learn as well as they should and do not make enough progress.
- Some teachers do not mark students’ work as regularly or as thoroughly as they should. As a result, students do not always know what or how to improve their work. The marking policy is not used consistently by all.
- The sixth form requires improvement because the teaching does not enable the students to make good progress in GCE A-level courses.
- Attendance has improved because of the work done by the academy and is now average.
- Leaders and managers have recently put in place more robust systems and approaches to improve teaching and raise standards. These are starting to bring about real improvements but have not yet resulted in good achievement for all students.
- Checks on how well school policies and new initiatives are put into practice in classrooms are not yet rigorous enough to lead to consistently good or better teaching.

### The school has the following strengths:

- Improvements in results secured by the current Year 11 GCSE students show that they are making better progress than previous Year 11 students. The school is on track to improve and get significantly closer to meeting floor targets.
- Lower-attaining groups of students, and those supported by the pupil premium, are now making better progress and attainment
- Teaching is improving. Inadequate teaching has been challenged effectively.
- Behaviour is improving and exclusions reducing because of higher expectations.
- Leaders and managers have made good progress with the actions identified from the previous inspection. Governance has also been strengthened.

gaps are narrowing.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 35 lessons, of which 12 were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, they made a number of shorter visits to lessons and tutorial sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Principal, members of the academy’s leadership and management, and groups of staff.
- Inspectors held meetings with three groups of students, representing all age groups in the college. Discussions also took place with students informally.
- Meetings were held with the Chair or the Governing Body and other members.
- The inspection team observed the academy’s work and scrutinised documents, including the academy’s own evaluation of how well it is doing, the academy’s improvement plan and statistical information about students’ achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- There were three responses to the online Parent View survey and 31 responses to the staff questionnaire. Additional comments were received from parents and carers and consideration was given to the views expressed by 38 parents and carers in answer to the academy’s own survey.

## Inspection team

Robert Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Steven Goldsmith	Additional Inspector
Raye Allison-Smith	Additional Inspector
Roisin Chambers	Additional Inspector
Ingrid Abrahams	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Grace Academy Darlaston is one of three academies sponsored by the Grace Foundation and has business and enterprise as its specialist subjects.
- When the school was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2012, it was given a notice to improve.
- The new academy building is under construction and is on schedule for completion in July 2013. The staff and students will return to the new accommodation in September 2013.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized school and there is a higher proportion of boys than girls.
- Almost two thirds of the students are from White British, Irish or other White or mixed White backgrounds. One quarter of students are of Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Indian heritage. A small proportion of students are from other minority ethnic backgrounds. A significant number speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is well above average. However, the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average.
- Provision for students on alternative programmes is arranged through Walsall College.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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

- In order to raise students' attainment and promote more rapid progress, particularly in Key Stage 4 and Year 12, eliminate the remaining inconsistencies in teaching by:
  - planning all lessons to be pacy and to stimulate students' interests and engagement with the subjects they are studying
  - ensuring that work is closely matched to the different ability levels of students and includes a range of learning activities that allows every student to make good progress
  - consistently promoting students' skills in thinking for themselves, learning independently and developing resilience so that they are keen to take responsibility for their own learning
  - improving students' literacy skills, particularly writing and especially for White British boys
  - ensuring that teachers provide feedback, both in class and in the marking of students' work, so that students are clear about how to improve and are given time and opportunity to act on and respond to the marking.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that all leaders and managers communicate the academy's values and vision in the execution of their duties
  - ensuring that policies are consistently and robustly implemented
  - evaluating the impact of teaching on the students' learning in lessons.
  - implementing the findings of the review of governance as organised by the academy.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- When students join the academy in Year 7, many are working well below the nationally expected standards for their age. Reading levels and writing skills are particularly low.
- The academy uses catch-up funding to support students to rapidly improve their literacy skills. Some students follow a bespoke skills curriculum in the Aspire Centre, while the reading skills of others are helped using the accelerated reader literacy scheme. Reading skills have improved significantly as a result of this intensive literacy intervention, but writing skills have not similarly improved. White British boys need particular support.
- Achievement is not good because too many students, especially boys, have not made rapid enough progress over time to attain the standards that they should in GCSE examinations.
- In 2011 and 2012, standards attained by Year 11 students in GCSE examinations were low in comparison with the national averages. Students did not make the progress they should have, particularly in English and mathematics. In recent years this has meant that less than half of the Year 11 students made the progress they should have in these core subjects. Consequently the academy has not met floor standards.
- Current Year 11 students are on track to achieve significantly better results in 2013. Many students have already gained GCSE grades A\* to C in mathematics and science. There is also a clear improvement in English with more students having already secured a good GCSE grade. GCSE results this year, based upon the evidence from examination units already taken in subjects, show an improvement which is also supported by the academy's tracking data and lesson observations and scrutiny of work by the inspection team.
- The use of early entry for GCSE mathematics and BTEC science has been most effective in raising attainment this year. This approach has improved the self-belief and confidence of students to do well. This is clearly reflected in the performance data, which show that the proportion of students making and exceeding the progress expected of them has increased significantly when compared to previous years.
- Many of the disabled students and those with special educational needs are making better progress than in previous years, as are students who speak English as an additional language. This is because of the well-planned and specialised teaching they receive. Good tracking systems and effective programmes support both individuals and small groups of learners well. These groups are now performing significantly better than other pupils, both in school and nationally.
- Historically, students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding gained over three grades lower in their GCSE examinations than other students. This situation has improved this year as past underachievement has been partly addressed. This gap in achievement is closing because of the one-to-one work, group support, and additional staffing that is used to provide mentoring and additional teaching outside of school hours. Currently, these students are less than two GCSE grades behind in both English and mathematics.
- A very small number of students attend lessons at Walsall College. This supports students to follow their particular interests which may lead directly into work. The behaviour of these students has improved and they are achieving as well as other students in the academy.
- Results in the sixth form fall back in Year 12 with students doing less well at AS level, but standards recover by the final year so that that students make expected progress at A level. Overall, students make good progress and achieve their best where they follow the BTEC courses as a result of better teaching which makes good and relevant links between the world of business and their learning.
- Although achievement still requires improvement, there is a significant amount of evidence to

demonstrate that it is no longer inadequate.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is still too variable and in too many lessons not all students make good progress. A very small proportion of the lessons observed were inadequate but the academy can demonstrate that there are less now than in previous years. Over two thirds of lessons seen by inspectors were good or better. Many good lessons were observed at Key Stage 3.
- Through the new assessment systems teachers have the information they need to track students' progress and act quickly to address underachievement. Not all teachers use this information well to check on the attainment of students or to plan future teaching and learning.
- In the weaker lessons observed, the planning often did not take full account of the needs of all the students. The learning of students with special educational needs and those eligible for the pupil premium were identified and often well catered for. However, the needs of the more-able students, and boys in particular, were frequently not planned for. As a result, while many were making progress, for some this progress was less than it should have been.
- In the lessons that required improvement, work did not sufficiently challenge students or enable them to practise their skills and the pace of learning was slowed. This was often because teachers spent too long explaining and did not allow students enough time to do their individual work or work with others.
- Learning improved rapidly in the more effective lessons where teachers had high expectations of students and built upon their positive attitudes towards work. Teachers planned lessons that were relevant and presented a variety of challenging tasks that students found engaging and responded well to because they wanted to learn. As a result, they made good progress.
- In a good mathematics lesson, the teacher created a number of activities within the lesson where students talked with each other and 'lead learners' supported their partner's work in ways that extended their understanding.
- In an outstanding English lesson, a confident, assertive practitioner with excellent subject knowledge listened to, carefully observed and skilfully questioned students to force them to think more deeply and challenged them to think, justify and explain their answers during an assessment of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Students engaged in the task with great enthusiasm and applied themselves conscientiously, making good progress.
- Where teachers followed the school's guidelines for assessment and marking, students received good advice on how to improve their work. Students made good progress where they had clearly understood and acted upon the advice given and the teacher had checked this. Students were less successful when they did not get the same high-quality of feedback from teachers.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils

### require improvement

- Overall, behaviour requires improvement because there remains some inconsistency among staff in implementing agreed behavioural policies and students have yet to take full responsibility for their own learning.
- Most students behave well in and out of lessons. Students generally arrive ready to learn and respond well to the teacher. Students are keen to learn where expectations are high and lessons well planned to meet their needs. However, where this is not the case, students are too easily distracted from their work.
- Sixth form students said that there were now fewer students getting in the way of their learning. Years 10 and 11 students observed that lessons have been much less disrupted than in previous years as pupils' behaviour had improved dramatically since 2009.
- Parents and carers believe that there is little bullying and that it is a much safer place than

before. This is confirmed by students who say that bullying is very rare and express real confidence in the academy's ability to deal well with bullying when it is reported.

- Poor behaviour is less common and the number of exclusions has reduced significantly this year. This is because the academy acts more consistently and is quick to challenge poor behaviour. Students understand this and have responded positively to the higher expectations.
- Overall attendance has improved since last year and is now average.
- The academy's procedures for checking the suitability of staff and effectively safeguarding the care and well-being of its students meets all current requirements.

## The leadership and management

## require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement as they have yet to develop a consistent and shared vision for the academy with all members of its community, including the families, students, staff and extended partners of the organisation.
- Leaders and managers have taken decisive action to tackle previously low standards and, as a result, teaching and examination results are improving. However, these changes are relatively recent and are not yet sustained over time in all subjects. Consequently, leadership and management are not yet good.
- The academy improvement plan is a detailed document that covers a wide range of the school's work. Monitoring and evaluation processes are sound. However, leaders and managers identify too many priorities. Consequently, they do not ensure that they remain fully focused on improving achievement to ensure the implementation of policies is consistent.
- Appointments of more effective teachers and leaders are helping to improve teaching. More effective practices in English, mathematics and science are leading to better outcomes, as evident in the improvements in standards and progress secured this year.
- Senior leaders are effective in challenging underperformance and have dealt with the challenges faced robustly. Performance management is closely related to the academy's improvement plan and has resulted in improvements in the quality of teaching. However, it is not yet linked closely enough to the progress students make over time.
- Although leaders are becoming increasingly rigorous in monitoring teaching, they do not always focus sharply enough on the progress students make in lessons when judging how effective teachers are. The academy's commitment to meeting the needs of all of the students is reflected in its curriculum; it is evident in the range of subjects and courses offered, including those related to the academy's specialism. The curriculum at both Key Stages 3 and 4 has been developed to provide pathways to enhance the skills of learners. The sixth form curriculum is being revised to complement these and better meet the students' needs.
- The range of experiences the academy offers, including the broad range of clubs and activities, makes a significant contribution to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is particularly so when considered together with the exceptional efforts made to support students facing the biggest challenges in their lives and to keep them engaged in their education.
- As one of three Grace Academies, Darlaston makes good use of the support and challenge it gains from its partner academies. The academy also makes sure that it receives a regular evaluation of its work by external advisers to check and inform its own judgements.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The Grace Foundation provides a professional governing body which ensures that all statutory functions are carried out. The local governing body includes three governors who are employees of the Foundation and a newly appointed Chair of the Governing Body. Members are equipped with a good range of skills and experience and are fully aware of the challenges that the academy faces and the priorities for action. Records of their meetings indicate that they regularly ask challenging questions of the Principal and other leaders. This includes, for example, demanding additional rigour from leaders in assessing the impact of pupil premium

funding on the examination results of these students. Governors have good knowledge about the quality of teaching and about how teachers' performance is checked to inform salary decisions. Their methods of gathering and analysing data about the progress of the academy are, however, too dependent on the Principal and senior leaders. They have initiated a self-review of governance to ensure that they are better able to hold the academy to account and secure the improvements needed to raise standards further.



## 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>	135956
<b>Local authority</b>	Walsall
<b>Inspection number</b>	408896

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Non–maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<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>	817
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	102
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ian Baker
<b>Principal</b>	David Shaw
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21–22 March 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 5683300
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