

The Open Academy

Salhouse Road, Norwich, NR7 9DL

Inspection dates 12–13 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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 a good school because

- Teaching requires improvement. Despite increases since the last inspection, not enough teaching is good or outstanding.
- A small number of teachers do not apply the academy's behaviour policies consistently. In some cases, students do not work as well independently as they do when directed by their teachers.
- Standards remain low and, although improving steadily, achievement is not yet good enough, including for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- The sixth form requires improvement. The range of courses available to sixth form students is not wide enough.
- The academy's improvement plans do not contain enough detail on how to raise further the proportion of lessons that are good or outstanding.

The school has the following strengths

- The academy is on a secure improvement path, with standards rising steadily year-on-year.
- Leaders, including governors, have raised aspirations and established a positive climate for learning. Students attend well and want to succeed.
- The systems used to manage the performance of teachers are robust, and ensure that teaching continues to improve.
- Students behave well in lessons and when they move around the academy. They feel safe and cared for by their teachers.
- The academy tracks students' learning carefully and makes effective use of planned interventions to boost results.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 27 lessons, of which four were joint observations with academy leaders.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, academy leaders and managers, teachers, other staff who support them in their work, the Chair of the Governing Body (who also represented the Academy Trust) and groups of students.
- There were not enough responses to the online Parent View questionnaire to make an analysis. The views of those parents who communicated with inspectors during the inspection by telephone or other means were considered, along with records of parents' views previously shared with the academy.
- The inspection team observed the academy's work, scrutinised the academy's data about students' achievement, examined records relating to behaviour and attendance, and looked at documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the academy's performance. It also examined the work in students' books and the homework set by teachers.
- Inspectors observed students as they moved around the academy at break and lunchtimes and when they were assisted in small groups or on a one-to-one basis.
- Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors made a further visit to the academy on 9 July in order to complete the inspection.

Inspection team

James McAtear, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jane Ladner

Additional Inspector

Sue Cox

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this School

- The Open Academy is smaller than the average sized 11–18 secondary school.
- The school converted to become an academy on 1 September 2008.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in the care of the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and those with a parent in the armed services, is well above that found nationally.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- A few students attend courses taught by local providers of vocational education, Norfolk Training Services (NTS) and East Anglian Group for Industrial Training (EAGIT), to study subjects like motor vehicle maintenance engineering and construction at a level equivalent to GCSE.
- The academy has specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs on the autistic spectrum. Ten students attend this specialist base for those with a range of specific learning needs. These students are drawn from The Open Academy and other schools and academies in Norfolk.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The Principal was appointed in April 2010.

What does the School need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good and outstanding and improve achievement, particularly for disabled students and those who have special educational needs and students in the sixth form, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers enable students to work independently
 - checking that the agreed approach to marking and feedback is applied consistently by all teachers
 - developing the partnerships with other local schools to extend the range of course options available in the sixth form.
- Improve behaviour further by ensuring that all teachers apply the academy's behaviour policies consistently.
- Strengthen leadership by ensuring that the academy improvement plans focus more precisely on the specific areas of teaching that need to improve further and give more detail on how this will be achieved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the academy having achieved levels that are well below those seen nationally. Standards at Key Stage 4 are rising, but remain well below the national figures.
- The acceleration in students' rates of progress in English and mathematics has lagged behind other subjects, but academy data indicates that the gap has narrowed over the course of this year and that most students make expected rates of progress. The academy tracks the progress of students regularly and arranges additional support for students of all ages who are found to be falling behind. Students make accelerated progress in the one-to-one sessions and small-group work arranged for them.
- The academy makes limited use of early entry for GCSE examinations. This does not restrict the attainment grades gained by more-able students.
- Although good progress is made by those students placed in the specialist resource base that provides help for those on the autistic spectrum, the achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is not as good as their peers.
- In 2012, the attainment in English of students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding was around two-thirds of a GCSE grade below that of their classmates, as against one and a half grades in 2011. In mathematics, this gap was just under a grade in 2012, slightly wider than in 2011. Inspection evidence suggests that this gap has narrowed this year, with these students now making progress at rates that are broadly similar to those of other students in the academy.
- Despite some notable successes, including one student who won a scholarship to Oxford University in 2012, overall results in the sixth form were disappointing last year. The lessons observed by inspectors, a scrutiny of students' work and data held by the academy show that achievement in the sixth form is improving. Nonetheless, the academy's partnerships with other academies and colleges are not sufficiently well developed to ensure that all students achieve at their best because they are offered a relatively narrow range of options.
- Students for whom the academy receives the Year 7 catch-up premium, which is provided to assist those who did not attain Level 4 in English by the end of Year 6, make good progress with both reading and numeracy. This is because the academy uses the funding it receives well. It is spent on an extensive programme that supports students on a one-to-one basis to improve standards of reading and to provide mentors for any students who face particular difficulties in their learning.
- Students who attend vocational courses at either Norfolk Training Services or East Anglian Group for Industrial Training make good progress because they are placed on courses that are well suited to them and because their progress is closely tracked by the academy.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although most teaching seen during the inspection, including that in English and mathematics, was good, and some was outstanding, the overall quality of teaching over time is not of a high enough quality to secure good achievement.

- Teachers know their students well and generally work at the right level. For example, they give careful thought to the students' literacy levels when selecting resources and planning activities. However, even in lessons observed where teaching was judged good, specific groups, including more-able students and disabled students and those who have special educational needs, were sometimes either insufficiently challenged or were not effectively supported.
- Although the overwhelming majority of teachers apply the policies the academy has put in place to manage behaviour, a few do not do this consistently enough. In some cases, students do not work as well independently as they do when their teachers direct them. This is because not all teachers are sufficiently skilful at making sure that students apply what they have learnt on their own initiative.
- The new approach to marking, as set out in the academy's revised policy, is starting to impact positively on students' work and progress. In the best examples seen by inspectors, the students are guided carefully and their subsequent responses are routinely checked. However, not all teachers are applying this practice effectively.
- A significant number of teachers have joined the academy during the last two years. The records held by the academy and the observations made by inspectors show that the quality of teaching has improved steadily and that this is accelerating the progress that students are able to make.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers make good use of questions to check that students have understood what they are being taught and to challenge students to think deeply. This gives students greater confidence in asking their own questions and seeking help with their learning.
- Students appreciate the efforts their teachers go to so that lessons are interesting, and say their learning is often fun. Records of consultations with parents held by the academy confirm parents' positive views on the improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Students are taught well on their vocational courses because the level of challenge they receive is appropriate. They respond well to this and make good progress as a consequence.
- Students in the specialist resource base are taught well. This is because those adults who assist them are well trained and have a deep knowledge of these students and their changing needs as they move through the academy.
- Better sixth-form teaching is having a positive impact on students' rates of progress and achievement. Students are challenged to work independently, both in lessons and outside normal lesson time, and they respond well to this.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour in lessons is good. They have positive attitudes to learning and contribute well to lessons. For example, they readily give an answer in lessons and take part well in paired and group activities.
- The academy has introduced approaches to managing behaviour that have been effective in producing significant improvement over time in students' conduct. This has included, for example, an area of the academy known as 'The Bridge'. The work of this area is well integrated with the rest of the academy and the staff who manage and work in this base are highly effective in helping students to improve their behaviour and in working with their families to

support them in this. As a result, the use of exclusions, although high in the early part of the last academic year, has now markedly reduced.

- The overwhelming majority of students agree that behaviour in the academy is good. Students say that the atmosphere in the vast majority of classes allows them to get on with their learning. Those parents who offered their views have the same perception, and the inspection team agreed with them. Staff at all levels in the academy say that behaviour has improved significantly because the academy's systems for improving behaviour are effective.
- Students behave safely and are considerate towards one another when they arrive at school, move from lesson to lesson, and during social times. The atmosphere of the academy is usually calm and relationships between students are good. Students mix well together.
- The vast majority of students feel safe at the academy. They are taught about dangers they may face from a variety of sources; for example, those on the internet, from electricity, fire and water. They are well prepared to deal with these.
- Bullying is rare at the academy. When it does occur, it is dealt with effectively and quickly by staff.
- Attendance levels have improved during the eighteen months prior to the inspection and are now above the national average for most groups. This is because the academy has rewarded good attendance appropriately and works well with outside agencies to help families improve the attendance of their children. The impact of this is seen, for example, in the improvements in reducing the proportion of students who are persistently absent.
- Students behave well in the specialist resource base and when they move into mainstream classes, as well as at social times. The academy is making a notable impact on the behaviour of these students.

The leadership and management

are good

- Leadership at the academy is effective. It has raised the expectations of staff, students and parents, made significant improvements in the academy's climate for learning, and strengthened the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, there has been a steady increase in achievement in most subjects over the last two years.
- Leaders have ensured that the performance of students is more closely tracked and that teachers account regularly for the performance of their students. This has lagged behind a little in English and mathematics, but students' progress in these subjects has now improved.
- The robust system of performance management adopted by the academy has contributed to this. Leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching.
- The academy provides a broad and balanced curriculum in Keys Stages 3 and 4 that meets the needs and aspirations of its students. For example, there is an effective mix of vocational and academic subjects for students to choose from. Its partnerships with external organisations are working well to promote subjects that might otherwise be unavailable to students, such as motor vehicle maintenance.
- The academy makes effective provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of its students. A wide range of visits and other activities enrich the curriculum. For example,

students now work with staff and students from the University of East Anglia to develop their cultural awareness. They also work hard to raise money for a range of charities, like the East Anglian Air Ambulance.

- The academy spends the pupil premium funding effectively to provide individual and small-group tuition to ensure that eligible students are very well prepared for public examinations and to ensure they have access to any additional equipment they may need to get the best from their education.
- The academy's specialist resource unit is well led. The progress of students is closely monitored. Plans to continue to improve this area are precise and clearly focused on making sure that the students it helps do well in their learning across a wide range of subjects in the academy.
- The new leadership of the sixth form is effective. However, the sixth form is small and this has limited the range of courses available. The academy is now developing partnerships that extend this range but this remains work in progress.
- The academy's plans are based on a deep and secure knowledge of the needs of the academy. However, they do not give enough detail on how teaching will be improved further to ensure that the proportion of good and outstanding lessons will increase.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements.
- The Academy Trust is working well to ensure that the academy is led effectively. For example, it provides an appraisal system by which the work of governors is carefully evaluated and it addresses any issues arising from this.
- **The governance of the School:**
 - Governors have a deep knowledge of the academy's work. They are able to account clearly for pupil premium funding and its impact. For example, they are aware of the extent to which the gap has narrowed in English during the last two years and provided strong challenge to the academy's leadership team when the gap in mathematics widened a little in 2012. They give an accurate account of the strengths and areas of development of the academy, both in terms of teaching and achievement. They support the robust approach to performance management undertaken by the Principal and provide significant challenge to the academy's leadership team. They seek to ensure that rewards for teaching staff are linked to the progress that their students make.

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	135650
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	423139

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	565
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	56
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fred Corbett
Principal	Jon Platten
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2011
Telephone number	01603 481640
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