

Ipswich Academy

Lindbergh Road, Ipswich, IP3 9PZ

Inspection dates 10–11 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
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 has serious weaknesses.

- Teaching is inadequate because students, and in particular the most able, are often not given hard enough work.
- Checks on teaching carried out by managers do not always detect when the work is not hard enough. As a consequence teaching is not improving quickly enough.
- Despite recent evidence of improvement, achievement is inadequate in English and mathematics. Most students do not make the progress that they should.
- Students' behaviour requires improvement. When lessons are dull, students are not involved in their learning. They misbehave and this gets in the way of them making good progress.
- The sixth form requires improvement because students have not made the progress that they should relative to their starting point.

The school has the following strengths

- The academy has a clear understanding of its weaknesses. Actions to address them are beginning to have a positive impact, particularly at subject leader level.
- Governance now offers good challenge to the school and to the Principal.
- Rapid improvements have been made to attendance, behaviour, persistent absence and the number of exclusions.
- The introduction and use of the compulsory one-to-one tutorial system to encourage and challenge students to achieve better.

Information about this inspection

- This was a two-day inspection carried out with half a day's notice. It followed a monitoring visit that took place 12 months ago.
- Inspectors observed 45 lessons or parts of lessons, taught by 42 teachers. Four lessons were observed jointly with academy leaders.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised. This included that relating to governance, school improvement, performance management, exclusions, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors were unable to take account of the online Parent View survey because too few had responded by the end of the inspection. Inspectors evaluated the academy's own parental survey responses.
- Inspectors took account of 61 staff questionnaires received.
- Discussions were held with senior managers, the Principal, middle leaders, students, representative of governors and the academy sponsor, and nominated staff.

Inspection team

Ian Seath, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Brenda Watson

Additional Inspector

John Ubsdell

Additional Inspector

Rachel Hobson

Additional Inspector

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- The academy is sponsored, together with 3 other academies, by the Learning Schools Trust. The sponsor works with these academies to share effective practice and accelerate school improvement. The academy is located in Ipswich, Suffolk, and has been operational since March 2011. The work is coordinated by the Trust's Chief Executive Officer.
- The academy does not meet the government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional government funding is high, almost twice the national average. This funding includes those known to be looked after and/or eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students who have a statement of special educational need, or who are supported by school action or by school action plus, is over twice the national average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that most is at least good by:
 - ensuring that lessons challenge students of all abilities.
 - planning lessons to allow flexibility and opportunities to develop skills of independent learning within all classes.
 - ensuring consistent high quality marking of written work.
- By improving teaching, ensure that all groups of students make progress that is at least in line with national expectations, so that their attainment reaches at least the national average particularly in English and mathematics.
- Improve provision for the most able students by ensuring that they are challenged more in class.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that, through watching teaching, leaders identify and tackle those lessons that are not pitched at a high enough level.
 - devising ways to ensure that students receive intensive literacy and study skills support when they start at the school, so that they quickly become confident learners.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- The proportion of students gaining 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, was below the minimum expectation set by the government in 2012. The proportion attaining the highest grades A* and A was low.
- In 2012, in English and mathematics, the progress that most students made was below that expected given their starting points on entry. The gap between the progress made by boys and girls was smaller than the average seen nationally. Students being supported by the pupil premium, which includes those known to be eligible for free schools meals, achieved on average a full GCSE grade lower in English and mathematics than their peers in the academy. Students with special educational needs or disabilities, including those supported by school action and school action plus, made significantly less progress than their peers when compared to students within the academy and nationally.
- Students enter the school in Year 7 with prior attainment that is well below the national average. In particular, literacy skills are weak and this inhibits their learning. Since the 2012 results were published, encouraging indications have emerged of improvements in achievement, particularly in literacy. These are due to improvements within the curriculum and aspects of teaching, partially funded by the use of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up money.
- The academy's own assessments of students' progress indicate that GCSE results are likely to improve significantly in 2013, particularly for mathematics. Notably, these indications include a narrowing of the gap between the achievement of those eligible for pupil premium funding and their peers in English and mathematics.
- At Key Stage 3, accurate data show that at Key Stage 3, students' progress now accelerates. This is most marked in Year 9 in both English and mathematics. In these subjects progress has improved from well below average and is now around that expected nationally. In addition, gaps between the progress made by different groups and their peers are narrowing, including for those eligible for the pupil premium and those with special educational needs or disabilities.
- The academy is in the process of abandoning early entry for GCSE examinations. Around 30 students have been entered for these examinations for 2013. The academy recognises that early entry has limited the GCSE attainment of some students.
- In 2012 the academy had a very small sixth form. As a consequence the only examination entries were for AS subjects. The proportion of these students gaining the highest grades was below national average. Academy data indicate improved performance in 2013 for A level examinations, with a substantial increase in the proportion of students attaining the highest grades. The retention of students between Years 12 and 13 is around average. Students speak highly of their sixth form experiences. The sixth form is growing quickly.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Over time, weak teaching has led to pupils making inadequate progress. Inspectors observed a significant number of inadequate lessons and lessons that required improvement. These lessons are often pitched at a level that fails to challenge all students. Because of this some students become bored and restless and disrupt the learning of others.
- Students are slow to develop skills of independent learning, especially when the structure of lessons does not make provision for it. Although they are able to access the academy's online learning portal at any time, students report that many do not take advantage of this facility.

- The marking of written work is too variable. Sometimes workbooks go for long periods of time before they are marked, and this leads to a lack of pride in their presentation. Good examples of marking exist, often in English. However, the wider correction of poor spelling, grammar and basic handwriting skills is weak despite recent efforts to monitor these important aspects of learning.
- The assessment of students' attainment and progress is now systematic and accurate, following the implementation of the curriculum model of the academy sponsors. The results of this assessment are not yet consistently used to challenge all students in lessons, but they are used well in the academy's one-to-one compulsory tutorial system. Inspectors observed examples of good challenge being made to students as well as encouragement to aim for higher levels of achievement. This system is recently introduced so it has not yet had time to impact fully. However, it is currently compensating for weaker teaching, enabling students to achieve better than they did at the time of the last monitoring inspection 12 months ago.
- In the core of good lessons seen, teachers plan flexibly, allowing for independent work that challenges students of all abilities. Behaviour is good because students are interested. The marking of written work in these classes is detailed, clearly outlining how work can be improved. Occasionally class time is devoted to correcting mistakes. Students develop skills of independent learning and confidence quickly in these circumstances.
- Sixth form students talk positively about their experiences of sixth form teaching. The school's view that teaching in sixth form is good was supported by the small number of lesson observations that inspectors undertook in Year 12 classes. These lessons were well taught, offering good challenge to the students.
- Teaching assistants work effectively in class. They have an important role in literacy support, an area that the school has rightly prioritised. The school can demonstrate that students with weaker literacy skills, including those with special educational needs or disabilities, are now making progress that is currently adequate and, for some, good. This represents an improvement since the last monitoring visit 12 months ago.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' behaviour around the school and in class has improved noticeably since the last monitoring visit. This is reflected in a downward trend of exclusions, although the overall level is higher than average.
- Poor behaviour in lessons does sometimes disrupt learning, but not when students are interested in what is being taught, or are suitably stimulated by what they are doing. Both students and staff indicated to inspectors that the application of the school's behaviour policy is not consistent between different teachers.
- Incidences of bullying or intolerance are uncommon despite some 'name-calling'. Students know who to approach if they are affected, and say that they feel safe in the school. Only a very few parents responded to the online Parent View survey. However, the academy's own surveys indicate that parents share this view.
- Attendance and punctuality have improved as a result of academy systems introduced since the last monitoring visit. Attendance is now just below average, having reduced from unacceptably high levels a year ago.

- The rate of persistent absence has reduced markedly from exceptionally high levels. This is still above average. Several strategies introduced to tackle the problem, notably the use of attendance panels, fixed penalty notices, and improved liaison with families affected are proving effective. Attendance and persistent absence targets are a feature of the academy's performance management of teachers.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Since the last monitoring visit a new deputy principal and several middle leaders have joined the academy. Together with the Principal and significant support from the academy sponsors and governors, they are quickly building a momentum for improvement. This is beginning to impact positively on teaching, learning and achievement. In addition, improvements in behaviour and attendance are clear. All of these improvements are from a very low base however, with some way to go before attainment reaches national averages.
- Leaders have a realistic view of the weaknesses of the academy. Weaknesses and strengths are well-defined and accurate. Priorities for improvement rightly concentrate on the improvement of teaching and learning. At subject level, middle leaders have a similarly accurate view of their areas. Action plans have precise targets that are easily monitored. Some of these are very recent however, and have yet to impact on performance.
- The observation of lessons by managers is now systematic and well-established. However, it sometimes grades lessons too generously. This is because the documentation used has a focus on teacher activities rather than students' learning. Consequently, when teachers are teaching at too low a level it is not always recognised and tackled. The systematic identification and sharing of best teaching practice is quickly being established by middle leaders.
- Leaders are now able to use the results of assessments to gain an accurate view of how well the academy is performing, and how well individual groups are progressing. These data are used to set targets for individual's performance management. Teachers' progression through the pay spine is now linked to the meeting of these targets.
- The academy makes sensible and effective use of pupil premium funding. Together with that provided for Year 7 catch up this is used to pay for staff to identify and provide support for those in need of early intervention. In addition, funding is used for family and community support staff. This has helped to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence significantly.
- The curriculum has sufficient breadth to provide for the needs of the majority of students, including a small number who undertake on-site vocational courses. The curriculum for English and literacy is strengthening through the introduction of additional support for those who need it. However, the curriculum for the most able does not allow these students to achieve to the best of their ability. A majority of students value one-to-one tutorials, and feel that they give good guidance to achieve better.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well-developed in the sixth-form but not elsewhere. Assemblies do promote relevant issues and students increasingly take on responsibilities, for example, through the student council. The curriculum does offer opportunities to develop moral and other issues, for example, through overseas visits and through topics such as the holocaust and world wars. However, these opportunities are not systematically exploited in class. The one-to-one tutorial system is helping students to raise their own expectations.

- Senior leaders check the progress of different group of students regularly and frequently, and these evaluations are accurate. Gaps in the performance of groups do exist and are significant, but in most cases there is clear evidence that the gaps are narrowing as a result of the steps taken by the academy. For this reason the impact of the academy's sponsor on improvement is strong.
- The academy has a number of strategies to involve parents and carers in school life and to improve communications. For example, they are invited to meet tutors termly to discuss students' progress. A parent council group has been established, together with weekly drop-in sessions with the family liaison officer.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have offered good support to the academy during a period of many changes. They are realistic about the weaknesses of the academy and now have an understanding of its performance data so that they are less dependent on analyses provided by senior leaders. Governors understand where the least effective teaching is, but are less clear about why this is the case. Their performance management of the Principal is sound. They offer robust challenge to the academy and have been closely involved in the development of the academy's good action plan. Governors have ensured that funding received through the pupil premium is utilised to the benefit of those that are disadvantaged. Governors have ensured that the academy meets statutory requirements regarding safeguarding and child protection.

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	136453
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	399831

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	903
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	80
Appropriate authority	The Board of the Learning Schools Trust
Chair	John Helleur
Principal	Nancy Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01473 729222
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