

# Alcester Academy

Gerard Road, Alcester, B49 6QQ

**Inspection dates** 25–26 September 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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		Good	2
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

- Not enough students make good progress in their studies because teaching in most subjects remains too variable in quality.
- When teachers plan their lessons, they do not make enough use of information they have about students to make sure the work is matched to the needs of all learners.
- Teachers do not always make the most effective use of teaching assistants to support students' learning.
- Teachers do not do enough to help students practise their speaking, writing, reading and mathematical skills.
- Teachers do not always check that students have followed up the written advice they have given them.
- Actions recently taken by leaders and managers to improve achievement, through closer monitoring of teaching, making better use of information about students' progress and making subject leaders responsible for the work of their teams, have not yet had the impact intended.
- A few students do not attend regularly enough to make the progress of which they are capable.

### The school has the following strengths

- In 2013, more students gained the highest GCSE grades of A\* or A than in 2012.
- The academy is improving the achievement of disadvantaged students.
- Students are enthusiastic and keen to learn. Their conduct around the academy is good. Good relationships between students and with staff contribute to what students feel is a safe and supportive school where bullying is rare.
- The academy promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The acting headteacher and his leadership team know what the academy needs to do to become better and have begun to take action to make improvements to teaching and students' achievement.
- Governors are well informed about the work of the academy and hold leaders to account for its performance.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons, of which 11 were seen jointly with senior leaders. They also toured the academy with the acting headteacher and made short visits to a sample of lessons. In addition, inspectors visited several lunchtime activities, and tutor periods, and observed an assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior and subject leaders and five representatives of the governing body. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of Stratford College.
- Inspectors talked with many students about their learning and life at the academy. They held formal meetings with three groups of students and reviewed their work in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors took account of the 55 questionnaires completed by staff and the 102 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspection team observed the academy’s work; reviewed current data about students’ achievement; examined records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance; and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the academy’s work, including self-evaluation and development plans.

## Inspection team

Frances Le Pla, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Suha Ahmad	Additional Inspector
Paul O’Shea	Additional Inspector
Helen Masefield	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Alcester Academy is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are White British. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are well below the national figures.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (extra government funding to support particular groups of pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and students in local authority care) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- Eight students access off-site provision on a part-time basis at Stratford College. A very few students are educated full time at Redditch College.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- At the time of the inspection the permanent headteacher was absent. The acting headteacher had been leading the academy since the end of April 2013.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that all teachers:
  - make better use of the information about students, including assessment data, to prepare a range of activities that address their individual needs, interests and capabilities
  - direct the work of the teaching assistants more effectively to make full use of their skills to support learning
  - give students plenty of opportunities to practise their speaking, reading, writing and mathematical skills in interesting contexts in a range of subjects
  - check that the written guidance they have given to students to help them improve is acted upon in subsequent work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by making sure that recently introduced initiatives have the intended impact so that:
  - all monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning leads to better teaching and identifies and shares good practice
  - the new, good initiatives for using, analysing and acting on data about students' progress are consistently applied across the academy
  - subject leaders further develop their skills in checking the work of their teams, so they are able to drive forward improvements in teaching and learning
  - closer work with families leads to improved attendance for the few students who do not attend school regularly enough.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Too few students make good progress. Students join the academy in Year 7 having attained standards that are typically broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics when tested at the end of Key Stage 2. In 2012, the proportion of students that attained five or more GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics was also broadly average. Standards were much the same in 2013.
- GCSE results vary between subjects. In 2012 and 2013, results in science were above the 2012 national averages (the latest year for which comparative data are available), in English and mathematics they were similar to the national average but in some other subjects, such as French, history and religious studies, they were below.
- Taking into account their previous test results, most students in 2013 had made the progress in English and mathematics that they are expected to make between Key Stages 2 and 4.
- Students' consistently good attitudes to learning are leading to improvements in their achievement. The work seen and academy data show that older students are now beginning to make more rapid progress, especially in English and mathematics. This is because the academy is giving additional help to those students who need to catch up through its programme of 'interventions'.
- Students are entered early for GCSE mathematics examinations at the end of Year 10. There is no evidence that this causes students to attain lower grades than they would do otherwise. This year's results for the students entered early show a substantial rise in the number of students gaining A\* or A grades compared with 2012. More-able students have the opportunity to take other qualifications such as further mathematics during Year 11.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress similar to that of their classmates. Although courses are generally well matched to their needs and include work-related options, not all teachers or teaching assistants adapt lessons well by preparing activities or support that are tailored to students' needs.
- The academy uses its Year 7 'catch-up' funding well to provide intensive small group teaching for younger students. As a result, these students are making good progress in improving their reading, spelling and writing skills. However, the academy does not yet do enough to help all students practise and improve their literacy, communication and mathematical skills in all the subjects they study.
- Pupil premium funding is used to help disadvantaged students through additional one-to-one and small group support in English and mathematics. In 2012, their attainment in Year 11 was half a grade behind other students in the academy in English and almost a grade in mathematics. Although these students still did less well than their classmates in 2013, the gap is now narrowing because progress for this group is accelerating.
- The progress of students who attend education in other locations for part of the week to study work-related courses is monitored closely. They make good progress on their courses and many go on to further study at college after leaving the academy.

**The quality of teaching requires improvement**

- There is not enough consistently good teaching for students to sustain good progress. Across the academy, teachers do not always do enough to develop literacy and numeracy skills.
- Teaching requires improvement because teachers do not use information about students' progress or their wider experiences sufficiently well to prepare activities pitched at different levels. As a result, some students often find the work too easy or too hard and do not make as much progress as they could. For example, students in a Year 9 science lesson did not find the work they were doing about Bunsen burners very challenging because they had already done something similar in Year 7. Despite this, their attitudes to learning remain positive and make a good impact on their ability to learn.
- Because teaching assistants are sometimes too dependent on the teacher, their impact is lessened. Teachers and support staff usually have sufficient information about students; for example in the form of individual education plans, and more recently, progress data. However, not enough strategies are planned or used to support students as a consequence.
- Although teachers mark students' books regularly, giving praise and helpful comments to enable them to improve their work, they do not always check that the guidance they have given to students is followed up in their next pieces of work.
- Lesson observations, students' work and the academy's monitoring data show that teaching is improving. There is some good practice in most subjects.
- Where teaching is most effective, lessons have good pace because the sequence of activities is well planned. They are challenging because teachers have high expectations and students' thinking is stimulated through questioning and tasks that are matched to their abilities. In a well-taught mathematics lesson, students were encouraged to select different worksheets based on the degree of challenge they felt they needed. Skilful questioning by the teacher ensured that by the end of the lesson, all understood how to simplify equations.
- Teachers have very good relationships with students, and this helps their learning because they are confident to share their ideas and ask for help if they need it. In an art lesson, the teacher created a very purposeful learning atmosphere in the classroom so that students felt at ease sharing their work with each other and accepting advice for improvement from their classmates.

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

- Students are proud of their academy and enjoy their life there. They are mature, polite and courteous in their dealings with adults and other students. They behave very well around the academy at break and lunch times. A large majority of parents and carers who expressed a view agreed that the academy ensures that its students are well behaved.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good. They are well motivated and keen to do well. They are punctual to lessons, settle to their work quickly in all subjects, and respond well to opportunities to work together. For example, in German, students worked well in pairs to construct a conversation about their favourite snacks. Just occasionally, students lose focus when the work is not well matched to their learning needs.
- Students say they feel safe in the academy and bullying of any form is uncommon. Reported incidents are dealt with immediately and firmly. Students are well informed about how to stay

safe and understand the harm that racist or homophobic name-calling can cause. Younger students in Year 7 say they thoroughly enjoyed the recent 'super learner day' which helped them understand the dangers of 'cyber-bullying'.

- Adults provide students with good quality care. Vulnerable students and those who have social and emotional needs receive good support from staff and this helps them to keep involved in academy life.
- Students enjoy the opportunities they have to take responsibility in their houses, the academy council or helping out at parents' evenings.
- The academy has used some of its pupil premium funding to appoint student and family support managers to work with students who regularly miss school, and this has begun to improve their attendance. However, attendance for these few students remains below average and their absence, mostly to go on family holidays, adversely affects their rates of progress.

### **The leadership and management** requires improvement

- Leaders have not yet secured consistently good teaching across different year groups and subjects to ensure that all students make good progress.
- The long-term absence of the headteacher has led to changes of roles for several members of the leadership team.
- The acting headteacher, fully supported by governors, the senior leadership team, staff and parents, has a clear ambition and vision for the development of the academy. He knows the academy well and has accurately identified what it needs to do to improve. In September, a range of strategies were introduced to improve the way the academy checks its work and uses data to track and analyse the progress of all students. However, these are still 'works in progress' and there has not yet been time for their impact to show.
- Although still at an early stage, subject leaders are now getting much more involved in checking the work of their teams by reviewing students' work, gathering students' views and visiting lessons more frequently. Senior staff ensure that this work is undertaken consistently across the academy.
- Leaders have quite rightly recognised the need to invest in high-quality training and coaching for all staff to ensure that teaching is outstanding. Although they have bought in support from other local schools, not enough is done to identify and share the good practice that already exists within the academy.
- The management of teachers' performance is well organised and any underperformance is tackled with additional support where necessary.
- The range of subjects and courses taught by the academy adequately prepares students for further education and training. The academy ensures that all students can access careers advice to help them make choices about what they will do when they leave at 16, and has good links with local colleges and sixth forms. As a result, the number of students who leave without having secured a place in further education, employment or training is very low.
- The academy promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. It provides them with opportunities to consider moral issues in history, science and religious

education lessons, and many opportunities to take part in a range of sporting or arts activities during lunchtime or after school.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors show a great commitment to the academy and bring a wide range of personal skills and professional expertise to their role. They provide a good level of challenge and support. For example, they engaged a consultant to support the business manager in running the academy finances. They know about how additional funding is spent and its impact on students' achievement. Governors ask searching questions about the achievement of students, based on data analysis. They fully support the recent initiatives introduced by the acting headteacher and take steps to find out for themselves how well they are working by surveying staff opinions, attending parent forums and taking part in 'learning walks' with senior leaders. Governors understand the procedures for performance management and the structures for improving the quality of teaching. They have established the links between teachers' pay and students' progress. The governing body ensures that the safeguarding of students complies with national requirements.

## 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>	137172
<b>Local authority</b>	Warwickshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	427051

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>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	601
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mike Dean
<b>Headteacher</b>	Paul Hyde (acting headteacher)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 January 2012
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