

The Weston Road Academy

Blackheath Lane, Stafford, ST18 0YG

Inspection dates 2–3 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well. All groups of students are now making good progress across the academy and in most subjects, as a result of the good teaching they are receiving.
- Leaders have established a high degree of consistent practice in the quality of teaching and teachers have high expectations of what their students are able to achieve. The marking of students' work is detailed and informative so they know how to improve their work to reach their targets.
- Students' behaviour in lessons and around school is exemplary. Relationships between adults and students are warm and supportive and students say that the school keeps them safe and secure. They show great enthusiasm for their learning and are keen to do well.
- The Principal is well supported by his senior team and governing body in his drive to raise achievement and ensure all students' well-being. All staff share his drive and ambition.
- Leaders have taken robust action to eliminate inadequate teaching and are relentless in their drive to further raise the quality of teaching.
- The sixth form is good. Students achieve well because of the good teaching and wide range of courses that they are offered that meet their needs well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In a small minority of lessons, the tasks that teachers plan do not fully match the range of abilities of their students, so that sometimes they find them too easy or too difficult.
- Although parents and carers are fully informed about the work of the school, the engagement of parents and carers, particularly those hard to reach, is an area for further development.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons, 17 of which were seen together with one of the academy’s senior leaders. Inspectors also made a number of additional short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with students, governors and staff, including subject leaders.
- The inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at policies, the academy’s own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and its development planning, minutes of governing body meetings, records of lesson monitoring, information about students’ progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students’ work.
- The views of the 37 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account, together with two letters from parents. Inspectors also took account of 41 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Robin Fugill	Additional Inspector
Peter McKenzie	Additional Inspector
Helen Owen	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average, while the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is low as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below the national average.
- Nineteen students follow a variety of part-time alternative courses at Stafford College.
- Students are entered for mathematics GCSE during their final year.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school runs a breakfast club every morning for those students eligible for the pupil premium funding.
- The academy is one of only four schools to be awarded the Marjorie Boxall quality mark for the provision of nurture in a secondary setting.
- The sixth form provision is in collaboration with the Stafford Collegiate, a group of 6 Stafford secondary schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Share existing outstanding practice to move more good teaching to outstanding by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently plan work of the right level of difficulty to match the individual needs of students, so that all students are appropriately challenged or supported.
- Develop the partnership between school and home to promote students' well-being and learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students typically enter the school with average levels in the basic skills of reading, writing, communication and mathematics. Over recent years the proportion of Year 11 students gaining 5 good GCSE passes including English and mathematics has risen and in 2012 was significantly above average. This pass rate fell in 2013 as a result of a significant proportion of that cohort facing challenging circumstances. Current assessments indicate that attainment will rise again by the end of the current year. Attainment in science has been below average over recent years but improved in 2013 and the proportion of high-grade passes across all subjects has risen.
- Leaders' robust tracking of students' progress across the academy shows that the proportion making or exceeding expected rates of progress compares well to national levels in English and mathematics. Lesson observations during the inspection confirm that students enjoy their learning and are making good progress in all year groups. Progress tracking of current students also shows that the gap in progress between boys and girls, identified over the past two years, has now closed as a result of leaders' rigorous actions to address this. Students from all ethnic backgrounds and who speak English as an additional language are making similar rates of progress.
- Students achieve well in the sixth form. Results over the past three years show that attainment at advanced level has been above average, with the proportion gaining the highest grades increasing strongly in 2013. In 2013 all sixth form leavers went on to higher education or employment.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported and are currently making similarly good progress to that of their classmates. Year 7 catch-up funding enables them to benefit from being taught in small groups which provide the individual support that promotes their good achievement. For example, in an English lesson for a group of boys in Year 7, students showed great enthusiasm and imagination as they used adventurous vocabulary to describe a derelict house. They were well supported and encouraged by their teacher, promoting their confidence and establishing high expectations for concentration and working together.
- Well-established strategies are in place to help to accelerate students' reading, including through the very effective nurture group. A variety of catch-up courses and one-to-one tuition are provided for the weakest readers, establishing a systematic approach and providing effective support throughout Key Stage 3 and beyond. This results in most of these students making good progress in reading. Students and staff regularly read together in 'Everyone A Reader' sessions each week and students throughout the school show enjoyment in reading out loud.
- Pupil premium funding is used appropriately to focus on promoting study skills. It also provides support for attendance, the provision of a breakfast club and the appointment of a learning mentor. This support promotes the achievement and well-being of this group, many of whom face challenging circumstances. The impact of this support has been seen in an improvement in behaviour and attendance for this group.
- The attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below that achieved by this group nationally in English and mathematics. In 2013 the average GCSE grade of these students was a grade behind their classmates. There was also a gap in the proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress. This was due, in part, to the unprecedented number of students facing difficult personal circumstances in this cohort. However, those of

highest ability made better progress than their peers in 2013 in mathematics. The school's current data for Years 7 to 11 show that the gap is rapidly closing for all ability levels.

- Students following alternative courses achieve well as the result of the practical and appropriate courses provided.
- Students enjoy their learning and are keen to do well. They receive constant encouragement from adults generating increased self-confidence and resulting in students' rising aspirations and very positive attitudes to learning.

The quality of teaching is good

- Leaders' rigorous checking on the quality of teaching shows that most is good or outstanding. This was confirmed by inspection evidence where almost a quarter of the teaching observed was outstanding. There remains, however, a small proportion of teaching that still requires improvement.
- Sixth form students told inspectors that the teaching they receive across the collegiate is good and that they value the encouragement they receive. Observations confirmed this. In a Year 12 science lesson, students were observed making outstanding progress as a result of well-planned and varied tasks. The teacher's expert subject knowledge ensured that tasks were appropriately challenging and enabled students to develop their independence and take responsibility for their own learning.
- Leaders are establishing very effective assessment practice across the whole school. Although early in the term, students have a clear understanding of their targets and how well they are doing. They are increasingly provided with opportunities to respond to teachers' comments by correcting their work or trying another challenge.
- Teachers in all subjects promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, by providing opportunities for reflection on moral issues and for teamwork. For example in a Year 10 English lesson, students reflected on the importance of dreams and discussed together their own dreams and aspirations.
- Teaching assistants are generally used well and provide good classroom support but also know when to stand back and enable students to try themselves.
- A minority of teachers do not plan tasks that sufficiently match the variety of individual abilities within their class. This results in the most-able students finding the work too easy and those of lowest ability finding it too difficult because the task has not been explained or demonstrated sufficiently clearly.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' behaviour in lessons is consistently exemplary. They show extremely positive attitudes towards their learning and show enthusiasm and commitment, particularly when they work together in pairs or groups, where students of all abilities are fully engaged in their learning.
- Behaviour around the school is calm and students are polite and courteous. Inspectors were impressed by the number of students who offered to direct them around the school or held doors open as a matter of course.

- Students say that the school keeps them safe, one commenting, 'The people around us make us feel safe'. They have an excellent understanding of the different forms that bullying can take, but say that it is rare and that there are a variety of ways that they can ask for help if they are troubled, including through the well-displayed 'bully boxes'. Students told inspectors that the school shows zero tolerance to racism or homophobia.
- Well-managed support for behaviour and the care and guidance provided for all students is thorough and very effective, but particularly for those for whom circumstances may make them vulnerable. The new house system enables students to be supported by a head of house who not only monitors their progress but also ensures their well-being.
- Students attend well and are punctual to lessons. The proportion of students who are persistently absent is declining sharply as the result of the care and support these students receive.
- Students in the sixth form are enthusiastic about the support that they can provide to younger students and the enjoyment they get from the contributions they make to the life of the school. They take their responsibilities in this respect very seriously.
- Parents and carers, staff and students are overwhelmingly positive about the behaviour and safety of students.

The leadership and management are good

- The principal leads his team with a quiet and calm approach and has established an ethos and ambition that is shared by the whole school community. Inspectors agree with their belief in the academy's capacity to improve further. The principal is well supported by his strong team, and together they have been rigorous in ensuring students' well-being and establishing an atmosphere in which students can learn and achieve. Leaders have been relentless in their drive to improve the quality of teaching and have taken robust action to eradicate inadequate teaching.
- Rigorous procedures for monitoring teaching are well established and a wide range of support provided for any identified weakness. This includes training, mentoring and coaching in small groups where good practice can be shared, together with the high expectations of all senior staff. This has resulted in a rapid improvement in teaching quality.
- Subject leaders are effective in promoting high quality teaching, being held to account for the progress in their subject and are well-supported by senior leaders to promote their professional development. The head of sixth form rigorously monitors teaching to ensure students are achieving in their courses across the collegiate.
- The academy knows itself well and has correctly identified key areas for development. The tracking and analysis of students' progress is exemplary, so that leaders can quickly identify and address underachievement and ensure equal opportunity for all. They identified that boys were not achieving as well as girls over recent years and have taken robust action to address this.
- The school engages well with most groups of parents who express their satisfaction with the school's provision. However leaders recognise that this is an area for development to ensure that all parents are fully involved in the life of the school, in order to promote their partnership in ensuring their child's progress and well-being.

- The courses that students follow meet their needs well and promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The well-established nurture group enables those identified as having weak literacy and numeracy skills to be taught by a specialist teacher ensuring that they settle well and meet the academy's high expectations for behaviour and attitudes to learning. The academy is recognised as a beacon of good practice in this respect. Careers advice and special days devoted to personal, social and health education promote students' well-being.
- Sixth form courses, provided in collaboration with other Stafford schools, provide a very wide range of choices that is flexible to meet all students' needs and interests. Strong procedures exist within the collegiate to ensure assessment information is shared and moderated effectively. Students appreciate the careers advice and guidance they receive.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the academy well and are highly effective in providing robust challenge and support for the academy and are able to compare its performance with schools nationally. Governors take an active part in the academy through partnerships with a variety of subjects, enhancing their understanding of teaching and learning. They ensure pay increases are linked to performance, and support the principal in his drive to raise the quality of teaching and in tackling the causes of underachievement. The governing body is fully aware of the spending of pupil premium funding and checks its impact on raising the achievement of the students it supports. It ensures that safeguarding procedures and practice are exemplary.

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	137553
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	427052

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
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	809
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Wise
Headteacher	Greg Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01785 356700
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