

# University Church of England Academy

164 Whitby Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 6EA

**Inspection dates** 10–11 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
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 has serious weaknesses.

- Achievement, especially in mathematics, is inadequate. Students do not make enough progress from their starting points by the end of Key Stage 4.
- Too few make better than expected progress in English and mathematics.
- Potentially higher-attaining students underachieve because the teaching they receive lacks sufficient challenge.
- Too much teaching does not enable students to make rapid progress.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are less than good in some lessons.
- Teaching does not develop students' skills in literacy, communication and numeracy as effectively as it should.
- Not all subject leaders are involved effectively in improving achievement.
- Procedures for managing the performance of staff do not focus sharply on holding teachers to account for students' progress and achievement.
- In recent years, the governing body has not held senior leaders rigorously to account for raising students' achievement.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Too many students in Year 12 leave the academy before completing their courses. Sixth form teaching does not promote students' skills as independent learners well enough.

### The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and senior leaders have taken difficult decisions and decisive action to help tackle weaknesses in staff performance. They have begun to address a legacy of low achievement. Teaching is improving securely and students' progress is now accelerating.
- Attendance has improved significantly and is now above average. Students feel very safe.
- Teaching in arts-related subjects is of a consistently good quality with some that is outstanding; as a result, students achieve better in these subjects.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 38 part lessons taught by 37 teachers. Six observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked closely at a sample of students' written work in English, mathematics and science.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers and teaching assistants, groups of students, two members of the governing body and a representative from the academy sponsor.
- Inspectors took account of a wide range of documentation including: self-evaluation summaries; academy and subject development plans; data relating to students' attainment, progress and achievement; analyses of students' attendance; documents relating to students' behaviour and safety; records of monitoring of teaching and learning and performance management; and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- There were no responses from parents to the online questionnaire (Parent View). However, inspectors looked carefully at summaries of parents' views from recent questionnaires sent out by the academy.

## Inspection team

Stephen Wall, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Bimla Kumari	Additional Inspector
David Smith	Additional Inspector
Osama Abdul Rahim	Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with section 44 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), 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 similar in size to most secondary schools across the country.
- Nearly all students are White British.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well-above average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium funding is well-above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of students in Key Stage 4 attend part-time vocational courses at West Cheshire College.
- Since September 2013 support is being provided to the school by a National Leader for Education and staff from a local academy, St John Plessington Catholic College.
- The academy was formed in September 2009 following the amalgamation of two schools. It operated on two separate sites until September 2012 when it moved onto one site in a purpose-built, new building.
- Since the formation of the academy, there has been a significant number of staffing changes and a significant reduction in staffing levels. The structure of leadership has been overhauled with a re-allocation and streamlining of management responsibilities. A new head of sixth form is in post.

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

- Ensure that all teaching is good or better to increase students' progress, especially in English and mathematics, so that it is at least good, and to improve students' attitudes to learning in lessons by:
  - making sure that all teaching sets tasks that are at the right level of challenge for students of differing abilities
  - ensuring that the pace of all teaching and learning is brisk and that the learning activities provided for students fully engage them in their learning and captures their interest
  - ensuring that teaching in all subjects uses questioning effectively to make students think deeply and encourage them to give extended and reasoned responses
  - making sure that teaching in all subjects has a sharper focus on developing students' literacy, communication and numeracy skills
  - improving the quality of marking so that it is consistent in showing students what they need to do to improve their work.
- Make sure that the achievement of the most able students improves significantly to reflect their

individual starting points and prepares them better for the challenges of the sixth form by:

- ensuring that teaching is always challenging enough
- reducing the students' reliance on their teachers and thus promoting their skills as independent learners more effectively.

■ Improve achievement in the sixth form, especially in AS and A level subjects, by:

- making sure that all teaching encourages students' independent learning and research skills
- ensuring that students are guided more accurately onto courses of study that are appropriate to their individual abilities and needs.

■ Improve the impact of leadership and management, including the governing body, on raising achievement at a faster pace by:

- making sure that subject leaders are more involved in and held more accountable for students' achievement in their areas of responsibility, especially the most able students
- making the focus on students' progress much sharper in procedures for managing the performance of teachers
- improving the rigour with which the governing body holds the academy to account for improving students' achievement and improving the quality of teaching.

Undertaking an external review of governance in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### is inadequate

- From generally below average starting points on entry, students' progress over time in English and mathematics is inadequate. By the end of Year 11 the standards they reach are significantly below average.
- The proportion of students attaining the benchmark of five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, is significantly below average.
- The most able students underachieve in a number of subjects, including English and mathematics. In 2012, the proportion of students attaining A\* and A grades in GCSE examinations was significantly lower than the proportion that did so nationally. Unvalidated results in 2013 show a similar picture.
- Although the proportion of students making the progress expected of them in English and mathematics has been improving, it remains significantly below the national average in mathematics. The proportion of students making better than expected progress is consistently below national figures in both English and mathematics.
- Academy data, supported by inspection evidence from observations in lessons and analysis of work in students' books, show that while achievement overall is inadequate, it is improving, albeit from a very low base three years ago when the academy was established. Leaders and managers are tackling a legacy of low achievement more effectively and some improvements are evident. For example, attainment has improved over the last three years at a rate faster than that nationally and the proportion of students now attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, has improved. Students' progress is still too variable however and, as such, is not yet fast enough to raise standards as quickly as needs be. This is because the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good.
- Achievement has risen most markedly for middle-ability students because leaders have concentrated their efforts on improving the progress these students make. The academy's approach to entering students early for GCSE examinations in mathematics and English, for example, is used to diagnose students' weaknesses and to concentrate on improving grades, especially those on the grade C/D borderline. There has not been enough impact however, on improving the achievement of the most able students. Leaders have not had a sharp enough focus on the progress of this group. Furthermore, the achievement of these students is hampered because the teaching they receive often lacks sufficient challenge.
- The vast majority of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs make the progress expected of them and some do better than this. Their attainment is generally in line with similar students nationally.
- The achievement of students supported by the pupil premium requires improvement. In 2012, in English and mathematics, students known to be eligible for free school meals attained broadly in line with similar students nationally but attained, on average, one GCSE grade lower, in both these subjects, than other students in the academy. The unvalidated GCSE results for 2013 indicate that this previous gap between students known to be eligible for free school meals and those non-eligible students in the academy has significantly narrowed. This is because eligible students are receiving more effective and targeted support. Although more eligible students are making expected progress, not enough do better than this.
- While academy leaders are now trying more effectively to promote an equality of opportunity for the different groups of students, this so far has not been successful. This is because, overall, students at the academy, including the most able, make inadequate progress when compared to students nationally.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is appropriately used to support those students who join Year 7 with lower than the expected levels in reading and numeracy. Academy data, supported by inspection observations and scrutiny of progress information, show that this is having a positive impact on improving students' basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, across the academy,

teaching is too inconsistent to develop students' basic skills at a good rate.

- In the sixth form, achievement in most academic subjects at AS and A level requires improvement. Too many students have not made better than expected progress or have abandoned courses during Year 12. Their achievement however, is improving. In 2013, results at both AS and A level improved significantly. Most students following BTEC level 3 courses in the sixth form make at least the progress expected of them and an increasing proportion are making good progress.
- Many of the small number of Key Stage 4 students that attend part-time vocational courses at West Cheshire College make good progress and achieve well in vocational qualifications.

### **The quality of teaching**

### **requires improvement**

- Although the quality of teaching is improving, it still requires improvement because not enough is consistently good or outstanding to drive students' progress, especially for the most able.
- The academy's monitoring records of the quality of teaching in recent years show that inadequate teaching has been tackled effectively and that the programme of professional development of staff is taking effect. More teaching is now good and outstanding in English, mathematics, the arts and humanities and the profile of teaching observed by inspectors supports this.
- Older students in Key Stage 4 say that, over the last three years, teaching has improved significantly but they also say that some teachers still talk too much and that the tasks that they are set are not always challenging enough. Their views mirror inspectors' findings from lesson observations. Inspectors also found that the pace of some teaching is not brisk enough to hold students' attention fully and that this leads to some off-task behaviour and/or passivity.
- Across the subjects, teaching does not always promote the development of students' literacy, communication and numeracy skills well enough. Although the academy is improving younger students' literacy skills, older students say that they rarely read for pleasure or outside lessons.
- Teachers do not consistently use questioning effectively enough to ensure students think deeply and give reasons for their answers. Students rely too readily on their teachers to provide answers rather than working things out for themselves. This is also the case in the sixth form, especially in the academic subjects, where students are not given enough opportunities to working independently.
- The quality of marking is improving, although inconsistencies remain in showing students the steps that they need to take to improve their work.
- Where teaching is good or better, the level of challenge is exactly right and questioning ensures that students understand fully what is expected of them before they start work on their own. The pace is brisk and there is a clear sense of purpose that engages students fully.
- Teaching in arts-related subjects is of consistently good quality with some that is outstanding. For example, in a Year 8 performing arts lesson the teacher made the activity to be undertaken crystal clear. Her infectious enthusiasm drove the lesson on at a fast pace but she was careful to check on students' understanding throughout. Students experimented with new techniques with tremendous enthusiasm and involvement. The progress that they made was outstanding as a result.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils**

### **requires improvement**

- Although students' behaviour around the academy has improved significantly, it requires improvement because, where teaching is not good enough, students' attitudes to learning are not always positive. This manifests itself in some low-level, off-task chatter or, more frequently, in passivity and lack of interest.
- Leaders have managed the transition of the academy to one site skilfully. As a result, most students are generally proud of their academy. They dress smartly and are well-mannered to

each other, the adults working with them and to visitors.

- Students move sensibly around the academy and with good regard for the safety and well-being of younger students. They behave sensibly in the busy dining hall. Students demonstrate a good understanding of the right ways to behave and are clear about what the academy expects of them.
- The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions has fallen significantly in recent years. This has been accompanied by a significant improvement in attendance, which is now above the national average in most year groups and provides a positive platform for raising achievement.
- Punctuality to the academy has also improved. Students move purposefully to get to lessons at cross-over times and at the end of break time and lunchtime.
- Students say they feel very safe in the academy. They talk knowledgeably about what may constitute unsafe situations, including potential dangers when using new technologies, and how to avoid them and/or deal with them.
- Students are aware of and understand the different types of bullying that can take place. They say, and academy records confirm, that incidents of bullying have reduced. They also say that incidents of bullying of any sort, previously frequent, are now rare and that staff are quick to deal with the isolated incidents that happen from time to time.
- The academy provides good care, guidance and support for its students, especially for those who may be vulnerable. It promotes tolerance and respect for others effectively, which has a positive impact on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Parental questionnaires show few concerns and most parents are satisfied with the standards of behaviour in the academy.

## The leadership and management

## requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, leaders have not improved teaching and achievement quickly enough, especially for the most able students. However, improvements in behaviour and attendance clearly demonstrate the ability of leaders and managers to bring about further improvement. Weaknesses in staff performance have been tackled effectively and standards are now starting to rise.
- Leaders know what the academy's strengths are and where it could and should do better. They have put in place many appropriate initiatives to drive improvement forward at a better rate, such as, tightening procedures to check on students' progress and setting more demanding targets.
- Leaders are tackling robustly the weakest teaching. Procedures for the performance management of staff are in place with clear links to pay progression. However, while leaders monitor teaching and learning more regularly, leaders do not yet hold teachers rigorously enough to account for the progress and achievement of students in their classes. This does not send out a clear enough message to teachers about the importance of raising achievement at a faster pace.
- Although the structure of leadership has been overhauled and management responsibilities have been re-allocated and streamlined, subject leaders are not yet fully involved or held to account for the achievement of students in their areas of responsibility. This hampers efforts to bring about improvements quickly, especially to improve the achievement of the most able students.
- New leadership of the sixth form is bringing a much sharper focus to improvement. Planning is of better quality and there is a stronger vision for future success in place. The quality of teaching has been monitored more rigorously and expectations have been raised. As a result, attainment at both AS and A level is improving. The numbers of students leaving courses in Year 12 has seen a modest decline because advice to students on what would be for them an appropriate course of study is improving.
- Recent and continuing curricular developments, including more focused curriculum planning shows that increasingly it is more closely matched to the needs of all students. A wide range of popular enrichment activities in sports and especially the arts underpins students' increasingly



positive attitudes to school and broadens their horizons significantly.

- Most parents are supportive. The vast majority have confidence in the academy and would recommend it to prospective parents.
- The academy sponsor has provided recent, effective support for raising the quality of teaching and achievement, for example, by brokering successfully a partnership with an outstanding academy.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Until recently, the governing body has not held the academy rigorously enough to account. It has not compared the performance of the academy to other schools nationally rigorously enough and has, consequently, not been in a position to ask the right, searching questions about achievement and the quality of teaching. It has been supportive of the school's leadership but has not sought the necessary information about the academy's overall performance and where improvement is necessary.
- The governing body has, however, managed the academy's finances astutely to tackle a substantial deficit when the academy was first established. This included supporting the headteacher in taking difficult decisions in relation to reducing staffing levels and re-organising management responsibilities. When in possession of sufficient detail, therefore, the governing body shows its preparedness to take decisive actions to tackle problems. The governing body understands the application of performance management of staff but has not yet made the link fully between staff performance and students' progress and achievement.
- The governing body is fully aware of how pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding is used and the impact it has on the targeted groups of students. They ensure policies and procedures for safeguarding students are fully in place.



## 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>	135941
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	428840

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<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>	947
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	147
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Peter Forster – The Bishop of Chester
<b>Headteacher</b>	Kevin McDermott
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 March 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 350 6000
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