

RSA Academy

Bilston Road, Gospel Oak, Tipton, DY4 0BZ

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Boys have not made rapid enough progress in English and mathematics in Years 7 to 11, for the last two years.
- The most able students are not making good progress in mathematics, science and languages. They achieve fewer of the top grades than the national average.
- Students who are supported through the pupil premium funding are only beginning to achieve as well as other students.
- Students do not all write enough in English or check their answers well enough in mathematics to get higher GCSE grades.
- Not all teachers have the confidence and expertise to deliver lessons that regularly target A and A* grades at GCSE.
- Leaders and managers have made changes that are improving teaching and raising achievement. However many of these initiatives have been put in place recently and this work has yet to result in good achievement across all year groups.
- Leaders and governors have not had a sufficiently realistic view of how well the academy is doing. There has not been a sharp enough focus on slower progress in English and mathematics by some groups of students.

The school has the following strengths

- The sixth form is good. It is well led and the highly motivated students make good progress on appropriate courses as a result of strong teaching.
- Students in Year 11 do well in some courses other than GCSEs.
- In some year groups, progress in English and mathematics of students currently in the academy is improving strongly, as a result of better teaching.
- Teaching is now improving much more rapidly because of well-directed actions by the new principal and governors.
- Behaviour is managed very well and is consistently good. Students feel safe. Attendance is above average and students have an influential voice in the life of the academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 30 lessons, of which eight were jointly observed with the principal, the executive vice principal or the vice principals. In addition, the inspection team looked at students' work in their books and listened to younger students read.
- There were meetings with groups of students, senior leaders, members of the governing body and a representative of the academy's sponsor, the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufacture and Commerce (RSA).
- Inspectors took account of the 53 responses to the online questionnaire Parent View and considered the 28 responses to a staff questionnaire.
- The inspection team examined the academy's own information on students' recent and current progress; the academy's evaluation of how well it is doing and its records of the monitoring of the quality of teaching; records relating to behaviour and attendance; and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Richard Boswell, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jeremy Seymour	Additional Inspector
Ahmed Marikar	Additional Inspector
Gwendoline Onyon	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The RSA Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The very large majority of students come from White British backgrounds. Very few students are at the early stages of learning English.
- The percentage of students who are supported through the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals) is above average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is broadly average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also average.
- A very small number of students attend provision away from the academy site, on a full or part time basis, at the following training providers: Black Country Wheels, Chipton; NOVA Training, Walsall; Start Right Training, Smethwick; Sandwell Homes, Oldbury; and at the Pupil Referral Unit, Oakham Campus.
- The academy meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A new chair of governors was appointed in the last school year and a new principal was appointed at the start of the current school year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and achievement, particularly of boys, in Years 7 to 11 by:
 - making sure students understand the links between the mathematical ideas they learn and their use in everyday life
 - getting students always to check their mathematics answers before moving on, particularly when answering examination questions
 - ensuring that English teachers, when selecting works of literature, choose books that interest students
 - checking students are writing long enough pieces of work to develop their skills and gain the marks they should.
- Raise the achievement of more able students so that they achieve more of the highest grades at GCSE by:
 - making sure all teachers have the confidence and expertise to deliver lessons that allow students to work at an A and A* standard
 - allowing the most-able students to move quickly to the hardest work.
- Improve the leadership and management of the academy, including its governance, by
 - focusing more closely on raising the GCSE achievement of boys and more-able students in English and mathematics
 - making the academy's evaluation of how well it is doing more realistic
 - making sure leaders and managers develop the existing programme so that all teachers learn from the best teaching skills that are to be found in the academy, particularly in the sixth form.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Typically, students enter the academy with standards that are below those found nationally. Since the last inspection, at the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving five good passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has also been below the national average.
- Students' progress in English at Key Stage 3 and 4 has remained below the national average for the last two school years in English and for the last three in mathematics. The academy has been slow to respond to the changing needs of its students and too many, particularly boys, have finished Year 11 having made less progress than expected. Some of the most able students have not achieved the highest grades in English or mathematics and have made below average progress in their mathematics, science and languages GCSEs.
- The academy's records show that all groups of students currently on roll are making better progress in English and mathematics, although this progress slows in Key Stage 4.
- Students' overall qualifications are boosted by courses that are equivalent to GCSEs, in which they do well, rather than GCSEs themselves. GCSE standards overall are below average. This is largely because of below average progress by middle and higher ability boys in English and mathematics.
- The proportion of students achieving a good pass in English has fluctuated over the past three years while it has steadily improved in mathematics and has remained in line with or above the national average in science. Students performed well in their GCSE examinations in 2013 in history but the proportions achieving a good pass in physical education and business studies were below average.
- The gap, equivalent to around two-thirds of a grade, in the attainment of those students who are supported by additional funding and others in the academy has remained broadly static from 2012 to 2013, in both English and in mathematics. The gap in the progress of this group has also remained static. The achievement of these students requires improvement. The academy's records show that actions the academy has taken are resulting in improvements for those currently on roll.
- At the start of the last school year the academy increased its active support and guidance for students supported by additional funding, both through the pupil premium and the literacy and numeracy catch up funding for Year 7 students. This has been spent on, for example, withdrawal groups for literacy, numeracy and language support; staff training; improved tracking of the progress of these students; gifted and talented provision for the most able; and holiday revision courses. As a result the achievement gap between supported pupils and their peers is closing, particularly in reading.
- The achievement of students in the sixth form is good. The academy offers a range of academic and work-related routes including the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma and BTEC courses. The new IB 'career-related' course is also offered by the academy. Following weak results in the IB Diploma in 2012 the academy reviewed and restructured its delivery of the course. With improved quality of teaching the average score per student on this course in 2013 was in line with the average score found internationally. The Year 12 IB Diploma students are currently on track to meet their target of an 83% pass rate. Results in work-related courses also show an upward trend in the proportion of students obtaining passes and in the overall above

average progress of students. The proportion of students staying on in the sixth form for the full two years is in line with the national average.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make broadly similar progress to other students. They have made good improvements in reading ages in Year 8 and Year 11. The academy is beginning to co-ordinate a range of new approaches for these students, but they have yet to show a marked impact.
- The small numbers of students who use alternative provision on other sites as part of their education are gaining appropriate qualifications and some are achieving well. Their attendance and progress is carefully checked and an Ofsted report of a year ago on this aspect of the academy's work found many strengths. All of the evidence suggests these strengths have been sustained.
- Those students from different ethnic heritage groups make progress similar to other groups. The few students for whom English is an additional language also make similar progress because of well-targeted support by the academy. The academy works hard to ensure that all students are offered equal opportunities and are free from any discrimination.
- The early entry into GCSE examinations of some students in English and mathematics has not always been beneficial. There is evidence that some students, particularly potentially more able boys, have settled for a lower grade than they are capable of achieving. However, some students spoken to during the inspection demonstrated improved attitudes to learning, were keen to improve their grades and showed a greater sense of aspiration.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although inspectors saw a broad range of quality in the teaching they observed during the inspection, not enough teaching is of the good or better quality needed to ensure all students make consistently good progress in their learning over time. The academy's own recent monitoring of the quality of teaching shows that between a quarter and a third of teaching in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 requires improvement.
- In mathematics lessons, where teaching requires improvement, some students are not always fully engaged by the tasks, and others find them too easy. Students do not see the links between mathematical ideas and the examples of them in practice that make the learning seem relevant. Students' work in their books and discussions with teachers show students, particularly boys, not checking over their work and making corrections before moving on.
- In some English lessons, teachers' choices of works of literature to study do not always engage and interest all groups of students. In some lessons students, particularly boys, are not pushed to write at length, about their own lives and experiences. They take a 'minimalist' approach to their writing and do not maximise the points they can score in examinations.
- Many teachers have strong knowledge of their subjects, which enables them to teach authoritatively. However, a few lack confidence or expertise when teaching the highest-level work for GCSE. The progress of more-able pupils slowed in some lessons when they spent a lot of time completing work that was easy before moving on to harder material.
- Where teaching is good or outstanding, the students are inspired by high expectations and tested by probing questions. For example, in one Year 9 science class all groups of students made outstanding progress in learning key words for their chemistry assessment. Their teacher

was consistently challenging them to seek improvements. In the same lesson, a member of the academy's support staff very ably assisted a small group of students who had special educational needs.

- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good in both academic and work-related courses. Well-planned lessons and effective use of resources lead to students working conscientiously on their tasks. Lessons make frequent references to situations in the workplace; for example, one Year 12 information technology lesson on spreadsheets put the students in role as hotel managers calculating food and drinks costs. Students learn to do effective research and are enabled to set up their own lines of enquiry. In a Year 12 film studies lesson students were drawing on their own interests and knowledge as well as the expertise of the teacher to choose their own themes for study, and a student for whom English is an additional language was given particularly good support. Sixth form work is promptly marked and returned with helpful comments and students are clear what they need to do to improve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Behaviour is consistently well managed by all staff and students have a keen sense of their own responsibility. There have been marked improvements in attendance and behaviour over time.
- The positive relationships between staff, students and their environment are very evident during the rolling breakfast rota. Students sit with teachers in a space that is bright and well cared for, enjoying a healthy diet and engaged in relaxed and mature discussion. Well-established and familiar routines mean that students move around the academy without fuss or bother and arrive punctually at lessons, in appropriate uniform, well equipped and ready to learn.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe at the academy from bullying or harassment and if any occurs it is dealt with swiftly. Academy records show that no homophobic incidents have been reported in the last three years. This was supported by comments from students. The low number of racist incidents has been declining. In addition, students show a well-informed awareness of e-safety and the importance of protecting their identity online.
- Older students spoke about the changes in the last few years to attitudes to learning in the classroom, now very positive. This is evident not only in the better progress that students are making but also in the behaviour seen during the inspection. It is also clear in the pride students have in the appearance of their uniform and the buildings. The student leadership team and student parliament have links with other academies in the RSA 'family' and offer excellent opportunities for developing essential life skills.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is also good and sixth form students make a noticeable contribution to the mature and purposeful atmosphere, more akin to a university campus than a secondary school. The development of employability as well as academic skills is a central feature of the academy. Sixth formers are engaged in volunteering in the wider community and internationally as well as supporting younger students in the academy.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their attitudes to the academy and consider their children to be happy and safe in a well-managed school. There are many opportunities for them to be involved in the life of the academy through the active parent council, and attendance at information evenings and discussions about their children's progress is good. The academy makes these events as accessible to all parents as possible.

- Overall attendance has been higher than the national average for the last three years and there is a trend of improvement. This is because of good communication systems with home, involving a range of staff. Persistent absence is below the national average and falling for the last three years because of firm and timely action being taken. Regular, tangible rewards have also helped to boost attendance.
- The frequency of fixed-term exclusions is also consistently below the national average and students with behaviour issues are well supported. The student support centre is used effectively as a short-stay 'turn-around' room in which students continue to study and are returned to their lessons as soon as possible. Use of this facility has been low over the last school year.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The new principal, with his team of senior leaders and staff, and the new chair of governors and the governing body all share a desire and a drive to do the best for the students in their charge. This has meant continuing to adapt the academy's original systems and strongly work-related courses to match the needs and interests of a changing intake of students, adding a more academic emphasis. This change has not always been swift enough and as a result some large groups of boys and more able students have not made good progress, particularly in English and mathematics.
- High quality monitoring by the senior leaders and subject leaders has led to improvements being made in the quality of teaching. This is contributing to the better progress now being made by all groups of students currently on roll at the academy. Senior leaders were accurate in their judgements of the quality of teaching when joint observations with inspectors were undertaken. Teachers were very positive about the training and professional development they receive and there are frequent opportunities for promotion. These improvements in teaching and the achievement of students demonstrate that the principal, his team and the governors have the capacity to improve the academy further.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good and there has been a rigorous approach to the identification and tackling of weaknesses. This has been particularly evident in the way outcomes from the International Baccalaureate Diploma course have been turned around from a very low point to standards in line with those found around the world. Leaders support staff well, to ensure good teaching and students have been encouraged to develop excellent attitudes to learning.
- The academy's view of how well it is doing that was presented to inspectors demonstrated the high expectations and aspirations of a committed leadership team. It was, however, not fully realistic in its assessment of the progress and attainment of students over time.
- The academy listens to the views of parents and students. While keeping many of the unique features of the academy, leaders have responded to parents and students, as well as to evidence from student achievement, concerning the length of lessons. These have been reduced from three to two hours and are due to be reduced further.
- There is an impressive and well-balanced range of subjects on offer to students across the academy within the 'Opening Minds' approach. These are well matched to students' requirements and are designed to prepare them for life in further education and employment. Careers guidance is independent and impartial and there are frequent visits to places of work and to universities. Only a very few students do not enter training, employment or further education on leaving the academy, and this number is decreasing. Improving progress in English and mathematics means that the better literacy and numeracy skills of all groups of students are

starting to offer them greater opportunities.

- The promotion of the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a high priority for the academy and it is a strength, encouraging good behaviour and improved attitudes to learning. The extensive use of the 'restorative' approach to behaviour management has helped to create a more harmonious school community. The timetable allows for a number of dedicated hours every week in which students pursue artistic, creative and sporting activities. The wide range of faiths and cultures represented in the academy population are reflected and celebrated in assemblies, lessons and enrichment activities.
- The improvements in teaching have resulted from close monitoring by academy leaders and managers and effective performance management driven by the needs of the students. This has led to some changes in staffing. Underperformance by staff or underachievement by students is now swiftly tackled through supportive action. If no improvement is registered then further action is swiftly taken. As yet there is limited use of teaching expertise within the academy, for example in the sixth form, to help other staff improve.
- The academy's sponsor supports the academy within a 'family' of other academies. This offers opportunities to share best practice and for students to engage with others from a variety of different backgrounds. The academy's sponsor has not always been sufficiently rigorous in helping the leadership to identify weaknesses and to ensure they are swiftly tackled.
- Safeguarding is given the highest priority and meets all statutory requirements. All staff and governors have received the appropriate training. The academy is meticulous in ensuring that students are safe and information is securely kept and carefully monitored. Links with other agencies are strong, for example the police speak highly of the academy's approach to encouraging socially responsible behaviour.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The new chair of governors has been instrumental in urging the academy to take more urgent action to improve students' achievement. The governing body are very supportive of the academy and take their statutory duties seriously. They have not had a completely realistic view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses until recently but do not shy away from asking difficult and important questions about the academy's performance. They now know what is happening in the academy as a result of having an exceptionally high level of educational expertise and experience combined with astute input from parent governors. As result, they have an awareness of improvements since the last inspection, including those in students' performance and the quality of teaching. They also check on how the academy is recognising and rewarding teachers, tackling any underperformance and how this links to performance management and pay progression. The governing body has undertaken training in order to improve its effectiveness and they ensure that the academy's financial resources are used well. This includes reviewing the effectiveness of the academy's use of the extra financial support to help improve the progress and attainment of disadvantaged students in relation to their peers in the academy and nationally.

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	135599
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	440347

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	1059
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philippa Cordingley
Principal	Daulton Redmond
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2011
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