

North Birmingham Academy

395 College Road, Birmingham, B44 0HF

Inspection dates

5–6 February 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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Although achievement overall has steadily improved over the last three years, not all students have made the progress they should in mathematics.
- Although much of the teaching is good or better, this is not consistently the case across all subjects and year groups, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- In some lessons, teachers do not ensure that an appropriate level of challenge is provided to enable all students to make good progress from their starting points.
- Marking and assessment are good in English, mathematics and science, but are not consistently so in other subjects so that not all students understand what they have done well and what they need to do next to make the progress they should.
- The sixth form requires improvement because the curriculum is not always well matched to the needs of the students and this hinders their progress. This is particularly evident in academic subjects where progress is below national averages.

The school has the following strengths

- Academy leaders have identified priorities for improvement accurately and have taken appropriate actions that are reflected in improving outcomes for students.
- Behaviour is good. Students are proud of their academy and they help to make it a safe and harmonious environment in which to learn.
- Attendance is consistently good and is above national averages. This is continuing to have an impact on improving students' achievement.
- Governors know the academy well. They understand its strengths and areas for development and support and challenge senior leaders appropriately.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 teachers in 37 lessons, eight of which were observed with members of the academy’s senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, an academy trust representative, members of the governing body, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of students in all key stages.
- Inspectors scrutinised 44 responses to the staff questionnaire and 26 responses to Parent View.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including the academy’s self-evaluation and improvement planning, student achievement data, professional development programmes and monitoring documents. The academy’s safeguarding arrangements were also scrutinised.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the academy’s view of the impact and effectiveness of the multi-academy trust’s services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess how well the support provided by the multi-academy trust is helping to improve the academies for which it is responsible.

Inspection team

Mel Ford, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Patrick Walsh	Additional Inspector
Tracey France	Additional Inspector
Cheryl Jackson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- North Birmingham Academy is an average-sized 11–19 academy.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for funding through the pupil premium (additional funding for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, or those who have a parent in the armed forces) is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is above the national average, and the proportion of students at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- The proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is significantly higher than the national average and a third of students speak English as an additional Language.
- The academy meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- No students access alternative provision.
- The Principal provides support for academies within the multi-academy trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 so that it is at least consistently good by ensuring that:
 - all teachers plan activities that are appropriately challenging so that all students make good progress from their starting points
 - the academy's marking and assessment processes are implemented fully by all teachers in all subjects, so that students understand what they have done well and what they need to do next to make further progress.
- Improve achievement by ensuring that:
 - the recent improvement in achievement in mathematics is maintained and secured as a result of consistently good teaching, so that students make progress that is at least in line with national averages
 - recent developments in Years 7 and 8 to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills at an early stage are fully embedded so that impact on progress is secure.
- Improve the progress made by students in the sixth form, by ensuring that the curriculum and qualification offer at Key Stage 5 matches the needs and abilities of the students to give the best chance of success in the next stage of their lives.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- The achievement of students, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language, requires improvement because students have not made sufficient progress in mathematics. Although there was an improvement in 2013, progress remained below national levels. Academy monitoring indicates that, this year, students are on track to make progress in line with national expectations.
- The academy has had a policy of entering students early for GCSE mathematics and not all students have had the opportunity to re-enter to improve their grades. In 2014, this will not be the case.
- Students enter the academy with prior attainment that is significantly below that of students nationally. There has been a three-year rising trend in those achieving five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. However, the attainment of students leaving the academy in 2013 remained significantly below average.
- The attainment of academy students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is better than for this group nationally. Although there remains a gap between these students and others in the academy, this is being addressed through rigorous monitoring of progress and appropriate interventions, and the gap is beginning to close. In 2013, the gap between pupil premium students and others was two thirds of a GCSE grade in English and just under one GCSE grade in mathematics. In 2014, the academy's monitoring suggests that these students are on track to attain at least as well as all other groups.
- The academy uses pupil premium funding effectively to address disadvantage, focusing on actively promoting equality of opportunity. For instance, the well-attended breakfast club and the Friday Club have had a significant impact on improving attendance which, in turn, is having a positive effect on the achievement of this group of students.
- The progress of disabled students or those who have special educational needs is in line with that of other students in the academy and, overall, is significantly above the national average for this group of students.
- The academy's tracking of students' progress so far this academic year indicates that the proportion of students achieving five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 will rise by nine percentage points in 2014 to reach national average.
- Those eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding are now being provided with additional support to improve their literacy and numeracy, from very low starting points, including access to a summer school provided by the academy. Academy leaders have also implemented a revised curriculum for literacy and numeracy in years 7 and 8 and, although it is too soon to assess impact, there are early indications of improvements, particularly in reading.
- Although the progress of students in the sixth form is good in vocational studies, achievement at A level is below national standards. This is because many students enter the sixth form with far lower than average attainment and their study pathways are not always well matched to their ability. This means that too many fail to make good academic progress, so that these students are not always well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Much teaching seen during the inspection was good or better. However, teaching requires improvement because too many lessons in lower year groups are not enabling all students to make the progress they should. This is particularly the case where the level of challenge fails to take into account the different starting points of students.
- Examples of good practice in marking and assessment were seen during the inspection and this was particularly the case in English, mathematics and science, where marking was good. However, in other subjects some books had only been marked once in the term and some marking did not provide students with the information they need to improve, despite the academy's detailed and appropriate marking and assessment policy.
- In weaker lessons, some students struggle to complete tasks because teachers have not taken full account of their literacy and numeracy levels. For example, in a science lesson in Year 9, progress of less-able students was hindered by poor numeracy skills when they were asked to plot a graph to show what impact variables had on burn rates.
- At Key Stage 4, teaching is usually good or better. Most teachers in most subjects use questioning well to help students to develop their ideas further and provide examples and reasons for their answers.
- In the best lessons, teachers check students' understanding regularly and adapt their teaching effectively to ensure that all students can make good progress. For instance, in a good mathematics lesson in Year 11, activities were carefully planned to ensure that students were able to assess their own progress rapidly and identify where they needed to focus to improve further. This then informed the teacher's support and guidance so that the lesson moved at a rapid pace and students made good progress.
- In good or better lessons, teaching assistants are deployed effectively and have a significant impact on the progress of less-able students, acting as facilitators so that these students can secure their learning and progress more independently.
- Teaching in mathematics has improved, and this is reflected in the increased progress being made by students in this subject so far this year.
- In some lessons, teachers support students to develop and apply their literacy and numeracy skills exceptionally well. For instance, in a history lesson in Year 9, students were supported to use a range of reading strategies to locate and interpret information from a variety of sources and then required to use facts and statistics to support sample examination responses. However, this support was not consistent across all lessons seen.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is improving, although some teachers struggle to provide appropriate challenge and support for the very wide range of ability within classes. This is particularly the case for academic subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is good because students' attitudes to learning are positive and their interest levels and engagement in lessons are high. On the very few occasions that this is not the case, it is usually the result of weaker teaching.

- Low-level disruption in lessons is uncommon. On the rare occasions it occurs, it is dealt with rapidly and effectively by teachers.
- Students have a good understanding of right and wrong. They understand and respect the academy's behaviour policy, including the requirement to behave well in the community as well as in school. They appreciate the rewards system and report that it motivates them to behave well.
- Students conduct themselves well at the start and end of the day, between lessons and at lunch time. Inspectors noted the positive relationships between students of all ages as well as between students and staff.
- Students, staff and parents express very few concerns about behaviour.
- Behaviour management is good across the academy and inspectors examined case studies that demonstrated marked improvement in behaviour over time. This is reflected in the significant reduction in exclusion rates.
- Attendance continues to be above the national average for all groups of students.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. The academy ensures that all students are highly aware of all forms of bullying, including cyber-bullying. Students reported that incidents of bullying are rare and, when they do arise, they are dealt with swiftly and effectively by academy staff.
- Students have an excellent understanding of when their safety might be at risk and how to keep themselves safe at all times because assemblies, form times and personal, social and health education lessons deal with these aspects very effectively. Students, including those for whom the school receives the pupil premium, disabled students and those who have special educational needs, report that they always feel safe in the academy and that they know what to do if they feel threatened in any way.
- All requirements for safeguarding are fully met by the academy. Governors carry out their statutory responsibilities; they ensure that policy is put into practice and monitor this regularly.
- All child protection training is up to date and there is a comprehensive induction programme for all new staff.
- Safe recruitment procedures are in place with six members of staff fully trained.
- The site is secure. Regular reviews of security are carried out which are completed jointly by academy staff, students and the community police representative.

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good because, led by the aspirational Principal, leaders at all levels share and consistently promote high expectations for all students. All leaders support the Principal's vision that every student must get the best deal possible. They work hard to raise aspirations from the point at which students enter the academy and have developed effective transition arrangements with feeder primary schools to ensure that these are shared and promoted at the earliest opportunity.

- Leaders monitor the quality of teaching effectively and, as a result, it is improving strongly over time, particularly in mathematics where weak teaching in previous years has now been eradicated. The school's procedures for managing teachers' performance are effective in identifying where teachers need to undertake further development and where good practice can be shared across the academy.
- A well-established calendar of quality assurance ensures that all staff know exactly how and when they will be held to account with a clear emphasis on demonstrating improving outcomes for students.
- The Principal has established an innovative programme of Thursday morning staff development sessions for sharing outstanding practice. These are led by those who have been identified through the quality assurance monitoring to have particularly strong practice in an area and have been well received by staff who report that they appreciate having the opportunity to share their successes and gain further expertise.
- There is a strong programme for professional development in the academy that starts with a very effective package for newly qualified teachers and continues to meet the needs of teachers at different stages of their careers. As a result, teachers say that they prefer to remain within the academy to move on in their careers because they know that they will get excellent support and training. This means that the academy is able to develop many of its leaders from within.
- Subject leaders have a very clear view of the strengths and areas for development within their areas of responsibility as a result of rigorous diagnostic analysis of students' performance. This means that they know exactly where teaching needs to improve and what they need to do to facilitate this.
- The curriculum is good at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 because it is highly responsive to the needs of students. Senior leaders review and adapt the curriculum on a yearly basis. For instance, the recently established Fresh Start curriculum for Years 7 and 8 and the White British Boys Programme, address key issues for students in the academy. Leaders make sure that students are well supported to make informed choices, and there are now Key Stage 4 pathways to meet the needs and abilities of all groups of students.
- The curriculum for Key Stage 5 does not yet meet the needs of all students because the greater focus on academic qualifications is not well matched to the abilities of the current cohort. Plans are in place to review this phase of the curriculum.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. It is promoted regularly through assemblies, form periods and in lessons. Students in all key stages access a wide range of opportunities that enable them to develop their confidence and experiences, including becoming peer mentors or student council members within the academy and undertaking exciting public roles. For instance, in a Year 10 assembly, a Year 13 student gave an exciting presentation about his role as a member of the Youth Parliament and encouraged his audience to take up the opportunity. A range of educational visits enables students to achieve beyond their expectations and experiences.
- Pupil premium is used effectively to tackle inequalities of opportunity, and the focus on improving attendance as well as achievement has had a positive impact on outcomes for students in this group.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors know the academy well. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development because they are well informed by academy leaders and are able to analyse achievement data independently. This means that they challenge leaders appropriately as well as provide support. Members of the governing body regularly canvass the opinions of students, parents and carers through questionnaires, meetings and attendance at social events as well as visits to the academy during the working day. Governors are involved in performance management and are well informed about the quality of teaching in the academy. They ensure that pay progression is firmly linked to teachers' performance. They have a good understanding of how the pupil premium is spent and the impact of this on improving students' progress.

■ The Multi-Academy Trust:

- The Academy Trust has correctly identified leadership in this academy as strong. As a result, support has been limited to the trust's regular programme of tracking and monitoring that is required of all its academies. This has included visits from the educational adviser, scrutiny of data on an eight-weekly cycle and an external review.

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	136032
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	440658

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	950
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tom McCook
Principal	Kim Popratnjak
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2012
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