

The High Arcal School

High Arcal Drive, Sedgley, Dudley, DY3 1BP

Inspection dates

11–12 December 2013

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| | This inspection: | Inadequate | 4 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Inadequate | 4 |
| Quality of teaching | | Inadequate | 4 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Leadership and management | | Inadequate | 4 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Achievement, particularly in English, is inadequate and progress varies too much from year to year in mathematics.
- Disabled students, those who have special educational needs and the more-able students make inadequate progress.
- The academy has not made effective use of the pupil premium to help eligible students make better progress, especially in English.
- Too frequently, teachers do not make sufficient demands on students and lessons get off to a slow start and lack pace throughout. As a result, students make little or no progress.
- More-able students do not have regular opportunities to deepen their understanding further.
- Teachers do not always check whether students understand what they are learning. Few teachers adapt their teaching to give extra help or more challenge to students.
- Behaviour requires improvement, because students are not always keen to learn and at times do not pay attention in lessons.
- Leaders have an overly generous view of the effectiveness of the academy and have failed to sufficiently improve teaching and achievement.
- The academy's plans for improvement do not focus sufficiently on raising standards.
- Leaders do not make good use of information from progress checks to challenge teachers about their students' lack of progress.
- Governors do not receive enough information about the academy's performance to help them ask searching questions of its leaders.

The school has the following strengths

- Students supported by the specially resourced provision for autism make good progress.
- Most teachers' marking contains detailed comments about students' work. Teachers usually check that students do the extra work they have been set.
- Students told inspectors that they feel safe and that bullying is rare.
- The subjects and extra activities on offer contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 49 lessons taught by 48 teachers. Seven lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also made shorter visits to several lessons.
- Inspectors attended an assembly and listened to some Year 7 students read. Inspectors saw students' written work during lessons and, with school leaders, looked in greater depth at a selection of students' books.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other leaders and staff, and eight members of the governing body.
- Inspectors read the responses to the questionnaires completed by 17 members of staff.
- Inspectors considered the views given in the 51 responses to the online survey (Parent View).
- The inspection team looked at a number of documents, including the academy's checks on how well it is doing and its plans for improvement. They checked the academy's information about students' progress over time. Inspectors looked closely at how the academy keeps its students safe, and the records of students' behaviour and attendance. They considered the records of governing body meetings.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Elizabeth Cooper, Lead inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Glen Goddard | Additional Inspector |
| Jalil Shaikh | Additional Inspector |
| Michael Hiscox | Additional Inspector |
| Stephen Howland | Additional Inspector |

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The academy should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.

Information about this school

- The academy is a larger-than-average secondary school for students from Years 7 to 11. Most students are White British.
- The High Arcal School converted to an academy in December 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding. The school is not linked to a wider academy trust and does not use the services of the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below the national average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement is above the national average.
- There is a specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs. This is a local authority funded autism unit with provision for eight students. The students are taught for most of the time in mainstream classes, supported by specialist teachers or other adults.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (the additional funding provided by the government for students who are looked after by the local authority, known to be eligible for free school meals or from service families) is just above the national average.
- A small number of students attend work-related courses, either on a part-time or full-time basis, on different sites at: The Education Development Service (The Black Country Wheels School), Stourbridge; The Just Straight Talk Project, Coseley; and Dudley College.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching, so that it is good or better, in order to raise students' achievement, by:
 - making sure that teachers use lesson time effectively and that planned activities challenge and interest all students
 - providing regular opportunities in lessons for students to explore what they are learning about in greater depth
 - Ensuring teachers check students' understanding during the course of the lesson and adjust teaching to challenge or support appropriately
- Increase the rate of students' progress in English and make it consistently good in mathematics, by:
 - checking students' progress in these subjects to identify any underachievement, particularly by students supported by the pupil premium, disabled students and those with special educational needs, and taking swift and effective action where this is needed
 - improving the quality and range of students' work in English
 - ensuring writing tasks set in lessons are always imaginative and well-resourced and hold the

attention of boys in particular

- reviewing the use of time in mathematics by students entered early for GCSE once they have completed their examinations.

■ Improve the leadership and management of the academy, including that of the governing body, by making sure that:

- the leadership of weaker subjects, particularly English, is urgently improved
- all leaders, including those in charge of subjects, have an accurate understanding of the performance of the academy and the steps required to raise standards
- all leaders accurately and rigorously use information about students' progress in order to hold staff to account where students are underachieving
- the pupil premium is used effectively to close remaining gaps between students eligible for the additional support and other students
- improvement planning is rigorous and includes precise targets so that leaders know whether improvements are being made
- governors develop the knowledge and skills required to ask questions of the academy's leaders so that they can systematically identify and seek explanations for any underperformance.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school. An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Too many students make inadequate progress, particularly in the key subject of English. The proportion of students making the progress expected of them was well below the national average for English in 2012, with little sign of improvement in 2013. Too few students made good progress, including students who had previously attained highly at the end of Key Stage 2.
- Standards by the end of Key Stage 4 have been well below the national average since the school opened as an academy, despite an improvement in 2013. There is still too much variation in students' achievement in different subjects.
- The academy is failing to tackle the gap between the attainment of boys and girls, and both groups underachieve.
- The achievement of students eligible for support from the pupil premium funding is inadequate. In the 2012 English exams these students gained slightly less than one grade below that of other students, who themselves made inadequate progress. In 2013, the gap widened in English to the equivalent of just over one grade. In mathematics, students' progress widened from just over one grade in 2012 to one and a third grades in 2013. In the current Year 11, gaps are narrowing more quickly in mathematics than in English.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is also inadequate. In many classes, students supported through school action or school action plus do not do as well as they should, despite the support they are given by additional adults, because teachers do not adjust their teaching to help these students cope.
- In 2013, the academy entered some students early for mathematics at GCSE level. The more-able students gained high grades, before going on to complete the second part of their double GCSE mathematics qualification at the end of Year 11. However, the academy's current policy of entering some students early in mathematics is not wholly effective, because once students have finished their GCSE course a small number of students use the time to improve their English, at the expense of learning more mathematics.
- Students eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding make less progress in English than they do in mathematics. Although they are making good progress in reading, because trained Year 11 students give them good support, their progress in writing, particularly in the case of boys, is not as good as it should be. The funding is used for tuition in small groups, computer software and sessions to boost confidence. The 'Wobbly 4s' project with a local primary school is helping students get off to a better start and make good progress in mathematics. Consequently, their attainment rose in 2013 and was closer to the national average.
- The small number of students who take work-related courses off site gain experience in practical and social skills to help them prepare for employment or further training.
- Students who are enrolled at the academy's specially resourced base for autism do well because of the good support they receive from skilled specialist teachers and other adults. This provision helps them cope well and they make good progress in their communication and social skills, as well as good progress in English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching**is inadequate**

- Teaching is inadequate because it is not helping students to make up for previous poor achievement or to make enough progress, especially in English. Although inspectors saw some good teaching and a small number of lessons where students' progress was outstanding, there remains a significant proportion of lessons where teaching requires improvement or is inadequate.
- Not all teachers use the time available in the lesson to best effect. Valuable learning time is wasted before the lesson gets underway, and students achieve a great deal less than they should. In several lessons observed, the pace was too slow, students stopped paying attention, and occasionally lapsed into poor behaviour.
- Teachers do not consistently plan activities which challenge or inspire students. This means that students are not stretched enough, especially the more-able students and boys, who do not make enough progress.
- In some lessons, teachers move students on too quickly to the next activity in the lesson, before they have had the time to investigate the topic further on their own or to think more deeply about what they are learning.
- Teachers too often rely on volunteers to answer questions, rather than finding out whether the other students in the class understand the work. As a result, teachers do not adapt their lessons sufficiently in order to give additional help or extra work to students where needed.
- Where teaching is good or better, teachers plan lessons which actively involve students and help them develop their understanding. This was clearly seen in a Year 10 religious education lesson, where under the teacher's skilful direction students embarked on a lively debate about peace and justice.
- Most teachers mark work thoroughly, giving students helpful comments on what they need to do to improve it. Teachers of different subjects make sure students' grammar and spelling are accurate, as well as following up any corrections. In the best examples, students have the chance to check their own and each other's work, and set themselves targets for improvement.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for students to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. In a religious education lesson, groups of Year 9 students listened with great respect to each other's views on genetic engineering. Year 10 students made outstanding progress in their dance lesson where they helped each other create a complex new routine.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- Most students follow their teachers' instructions in lessons and are willing to take part when asked. However, students are not always ready to be involved in their learning. This occurs especially where they do not find the learning interesting or at the right level of difficulty. Occasionally, a small number of students spoil the learning for their classmates, where the teaching is inadequate or where a few members of staff manage behaviour less well.
- Around the academy, behaviour is orderly, including when students move to lessons along the crowded corridors. A few incidents of more immature behaviour were seen during the inspection, however. The number of students who are not allowed to attend school for a short period

because of poor behaviour has been reduced because the academy gives extra support to pupils who find it hard to settle into school routines.

- Students who spoke to inspectors said they felt safe, and most parents and staff agree. Students know how to keep themselves safe, including when on the internet. They understand the different forms that bullying can take, and state that bullying is rare.
- Most students are courteous and welcoming to each other and to staff and visitors. The academy is a harmonious community, where racist incidents are uncommon.
- Music and sport figure strongly in the life of the academy, and there are good opportunities for visits abroad and nearer to home. The academy has done well in national music competitions, and students take part in science and technology challenges.
- Students' attendance has risen over the last two years and is now in line with the national average. The proportion of students who are away from school for longer periods has reduced because the academy has worked closely with their parents. Most students are punctual, although a few need reminding by staff to get to their lessons on time.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Senior leaders' views of the academy's performance are inaccurate. They do not realise how much the weaknesses in English, both in the last two years and currently, contribute to the inadequate achievement overall.
- The academy has introduced new systems to check the progress of students in each year group. Although much information is gathered about students' progress, leaders do not make sufficiently effective use of this data in order to hold staff to account where students are underachieving. As a result, gaps are not narrowing quickly enough between different groups of students, including students eligible for the pupil premium and other students.
- Despite the improvements seen in mathematics and science, leaders have not tackled underachievement and weaknesses in teaching quality and subject leadership with sufficient urgency. Leaders have failed to eradicate weaker teaching in English quickly enough, and this has contributed to the continuing poor results.
- The academy has used its pupil premium funding to provide extra teachers in English and mathematics, Saturday revision classes, and payment towards music lessons and educational visits. However, this is not yet making tangible differences to students' achievement.
- Improvement planning lacks precise targets against which success can be judged, particularly in terms of students' results.
- Despite the academy's drive to improve teaching, a significant proportion of teaching is not good enough to help students make faster progress and to catch up. The academy uses a number of external consultants to provide advice on teaching. However, suggestions made to improve the quality of lessons, such as planning learning that is sufficiently challenging for all groups of students, are not consistently put into practice.
- The academy was unable to give inspectors details about its arrangements for setting targets for

teachers to improve their work, including how these relate to pay rises. Inspectors were unable, therefore, to check whether pay rises are appropriately linked to the quality of teaching and students' progress.

- Some teachers in charge of areas of the academy's work are relatively inexperienced in their role, but are beginning to work together to learn from each other. Teachers value the training provided, which is starting to make a difference to the quality of teaching.
- The curriculum offers a broad and balanced range of subjects. Recognising that some students start Year 7 with lower attainment in English than is usually expected, the academy redesigned the learning of this 'golden group' to boost their reading and writing skills while learning other subjects. In one good example, a student confidently explained his choice of onomatopoeia in the word 'crackle' when writing about a log fire at Christmas.
- Although most subjects lead to GCSE, students can choose work-related courses, including engineering and health and social care. The guidance they receive, both from the academy and outside, helps them move on to training and apprenticeships after Year 11.
- The academy meets statutory requirements for safeguarding students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are loyal to the academy, but they lack the skills and knowledge required to hold it to account. Despite their training on how to make use of performance data, governors have been too reliant on senior leaders for information about students' progress. Governors have no experience in comparing the academy's performance with similar academies and schools nationally. They are insufficiently aware of the weaknesses in students' past and present achievement and the link with inadequate teaching, and so do not challenge the academy's leaders enough.
 - Although governors look at how the pupil premium is spent, they do not know whether the gaps are being narrowed quickly enough between students who are eligible for the additional funding and other students.
 - Governors can explain the academy's priority to improve teaching and are committed to training for staff, so that teachers can gain more responsibility. The Chair of Governors carried out joint lesson observations with senior leaders and an external consultant. Governors have supported leaders in tackling some of the weaker teaching, but are less aware that teachers should be rewarded on the basis of how successful they are at ensuring students make good progress.
 - Governors have asked challenging questions of the academy's leaders about what is being done to improve students' behaviour.
 - Governors find out what parents think about the academy through regular questionnaires, as well as encouraging parents to take part in the online questionnaire (Parent View).

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| 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

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| Unique reference number | 137705 |
| Local authority | Dudley |
| Inspection number | 427142 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1201 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Roger Beese |
| Headteacher | Jo Manson |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Telephone number | 0845 1550411 |
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