

University of Chester Academy Northwich

Shipbrook Road, Rudheath, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 7DT

Inspection dates

5–6 February 2014

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 is inadequate. Between joining the academy in Year 7 and leaving in Year 11 students, including all the different groups, do not make sufficient progress in the majority of subjects. They do not reach the levels of attainment expected for their age.
- Teaching is inadequate because over time it has not enabled students to make good enough progress from their individual starting points.
- Teachers generally do not assess students' work accurately enough, and therefore are not able to provide appropriate work for students, or to provide them with accurate enough information about how they can improve their work.
- Expectations of how well students should achieve are not high enough. Teachers do not always provide activities which are sufficiently challenging, and this affects the progress of the most able in particular.
- Students' behaviour requires improvement because their attitudes to learning are not always as positive as they need to be to ensure their progress.
- Leadership is inadequate. Leaders and governors have too generous a view of how well the academy is performing. They do not monitor its work rigorously enough, or take into account the full range of evidence when making judgements.
- Leaders are unable to identify appropriate actions and have been unable to bring about rapid improvement in the quality of teaching or student achievement.
- Subject leaders and teachers are not always held fully accountable for the progress of the students.

The school has the following strengths

- Students are confident that they are well cared for because the academy systems for ensuring that students are safe are good.
- Students are courteous and respectful towards each other. Attendance has improved.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 23 lessons taught by 23 different teachers. Three of these lessons were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors observed students' behaviour around the academy as well as in lessons. They talked to students informally about their learning, as well as holding more formal meetings with groups of students from each key stage.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, members of the teaching staff, as well as with representatives from the sponsors and the governing body.
- The views of 15 parents who responded to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account.
- The inspection team examined a range of documentation, including data about students' achievement from internal tracking systems and analysis provided by academy leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised leaders' monitoring records, including minutes of meetings, as well as information provided relating to attendance, safeguarding and behaviour.

Inspection team

Christine Birchall, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Denis Oliver	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 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.

Information about this school

- The University of Chester Academy Northwich is a much smaller than average-sized secondary academy. The overwhelming majority of students are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of students who are supported by the pupil premium funding is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided for students who are eligible for free school meals, the children of service families, and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportions of students who are supported at school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are higher than the national averages.
- The academy is part of the University of Chester Multi Academy Trust, which includes five other secondary schools and four primary schools. It has specialisms in arts and science.
- Under the direction of the sponsor, the academy receives support from an outstanding secondary academy.
- Two students from Key Stage 4 attend full-time off-site alternative provision at the Big X.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum level expected for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Rapidly improve the quality of teaching across the academy so that it is at least good or better, in order to raise attainment and accelerate progress in all subjects, by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching
 - ensuring that all data about how well students are learning are accurate, and that teachers use it to plan lessons which challenge all learners to make at least good progress
 - setting ambitious targets for students, particularly the most able, in order to raise teachers' expectations of what they can achieve
 - ensuring that teachers assess students' work accurately, and improve the effectiveness of their marking and feedback so that all students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - ensuring that students' literacy skills are systematically developed across the curriculum
 - identifying bespoke training programmes for individual teachers to specifically help them improve their teaching skills.
- Improve behaviour so that students' attitudes to learning are always positive and enable them to make more rapid progress in lessons.

- Increase the effectiveness of both senior and middle leaders on improving teaching and achievement by:
 - ensuring that the systems which are in place to check on how well the academy is performing are robust, accurate, and used to identify clear priorities and actions
 - ensuring that leaders use the full range of available information, including students' progress and work in their books, when judging the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that all subject leaders and teachers are rigorously held to account for the progress of students
 - developing effective strategies for sharing the good and outstanding practice which exists within the academy.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

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.

Ofsted will make recommendations on governance to the authority responsible for the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Students do not make enough progress in the majority of subjects including mathematics, science and humanities. From their well-below average levels of attainment on entry to the academy, the gaps between their attainment and that nationally are not closing sufficiently quickly by the time they leave the academy; consequently, students make inadequate progress.
- Targets which are set for students are not demanding enough, and this particularly affects the progress of the most able because teachers across the year groups and subjects do not always set them work which is challenging. As a result, the most able students are not stretched in lessons and do not achieve as well as they should.
- In 2013, in a significant number of subjects, results were lower than academy leaders were expecting. The academy's internal tracking data indicate that there will be some improvements in achievement this year. However, this expected improvement was not supported by much of the work seen in students' books or in observations of how well students achieve in lessons. In a number of books students are working well below their minimum targets. Therefore, there was little evidence to support the academy's view of improvements.
- The academy's current data show that the gaps between the attainment of those students who are supported by the pupil premium and those who are not have widened. At GCSE, students who are eligible for free school meals are typically attaining one grade below those who are not eligible in English and mathematics.
- The achievement of disabled students or those who have special educational needs is also inadequate overall and varies across subjects. For example, the proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs who are making expected progress in mathematics is much lower than in English. In individual cases, including those students who attend alternative provision, the quality of the academy's care to remove barriers to their learning is having a positive impact on their achievement.
- There has been an increased focus on the development of literacy across the academy this year. Although there have been some improvements in English, there are still not enough students making expected progress in this subject. Strategies for supporting students to develop their literacy skills are not used consistently across all subjects, and for a significant number of students in Years 8 to 11, their ability to read and write coherently is proving a barrier to their progress.
- Students with lower reading ages are identified and supported through Year 7 catch up funding, and there is evidence that the reading skills of those students are improving.
- In mathematics, students lack understanding of key mathematical language, and this hinders their achievement.
- The majority of the Year 11 cohort has been entered earlier than usually is the case for GCSE mathematics and for English. Results have been used to set students into different groups in order to target them more closely. However, this early entry has prevented a number of students from eventually being able to demonstrate good progress because they have not had time to develop the skills they need to be successful in the examinations.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- Teaching over time has not been strong enough to enable students to make expected progress. Of the teaching observed during the inspection, too much required improvement or was inadequate. Overall, teaching is still too variable in quality to ensure consistently good progress of all groups of students across all subjects.
- Teachers do not always have high enough expectations about what students can achieve, and do not use information about how well students are achieving to provide activities which lead to

good progress. In some lessons, where there is a wide range of ability and targets, all students are still completing the same work which means that the most able are not sufficiently challenged. Students are sometimes discouraged from moving on even when they have completed the work set and express a wish to do more. In an English lesson, for example, students were working from a worksheet and some wanted to move to the next set of questions but were told that they needed to wait; consequently, the progress those students made in that lesson was not as rapid as it could have been.

- Teachers do not always use questions well enough to probe and develop students' understanding. Too frequently they accept low-level and superficial responses, and do not take opportunities to explore and correct students' misconceptions, particularly in mathematics.
- Teachers are not always clear about what it is that they want students to learn during the lesson. This means that insufficient time is given for key concepts to be explored in depth. As a result, the students do not always have the understanding they need to complete written work successfully.
- The quality of marking and assessment in students' books is variable. On some occasions, teachers do not challenge students to do better work and make comments which are too positive when students are working well below their minimum targets.
- Teachers' assessment is not always accurate and as a result some students think that they are doing better than they are.
- Teachers often make comments on work such as 'include more detail', which do not give students precise enough information about what exactly it is that they need to do to improve. Students are not generally given enough opportunity to read the teacher's comments and use them to correct or develop their work. Teachers sometimes ignore literacy errors, even when those errors prevent the writing from making sense.
- There are examples of outstanding teaching practice in the academy which results in rapid progress. In such a French lesson, for example, the teacher used her impressive subject knowledge to develop the students' skills through high-level but supported challenge, and used a range of different types of props and questions to check their understanding. The teacher also ensured that the teaching assistant had a well-planned and crucial role in moving learning forward. When the main activity was set, it was planned so that all students could access it with different levels of support. Work in books was well marked and students were expected to make improvements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. In some lessons students' less than positive attitudes to learning hamper their progress. They do not take sufficient trouble to complete work or to present it neatly and with pride. Sometimes students do not pay attention to the teacher and talk about other things when they should be getting on with their work.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Parents are confident that the academy keeps their children safe, and students share this view. They state that there is a high adult presence around the site so that there is always someone to turn to if they have a concern, and are confident that teachers are always willing to listen to them and help them if issues arise.
- Leaders' systems for safeguarding students are secure. They are quick to identify students who are vulnerable or at risk, and take appropriate action, including working with outside agencies and parents if necessary.
- Students have a good understanding of the different forms which bullying may take, and know how to protect themselves from, for example, cyber-bullying. Those spoken to say that bullying in the academy is rare and that staff generally deal with it effectively.
- Students' attitudes around the academy are very positive. They move around the building in a calm and responsible fashion, and treat fellow students and visitors with courtesy and respect.

They say that because the academy gives them a range of opportunities to take responsibility, for example, by acting as student leaders, they become increasingly mature and confident as they progress through the academy.

- Attendance has improved and is now average; the number of fixed-term exclusions has been reduced. Students wear their uniform with pride, and there is very little litter left around school during breaks and lunchtimes.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leaders are not demonstrating the capacity to bring about the required improvements rapidly enough. Activities to monitor how well the academy is doing are not carried out frequently. Outcomes are not evaluated rigorously or realistically enough by leaders to enable them to reach accurate conclusions about the academy's strengths and areas for development. As a result, leaders have an inflated view of the academy's performance. This means that planned actions to improve are not sharp and do not have clear success criteria to enable leaders to check that they are having the desired impact.
- Subject leaders are not challenged strongly enough about how well students are doing in their subjects and therefore they do not hold teachers in their department fully accountable for progress in their classes.
- Leaders do not have high enough expectations of what students can achieve, and targets that are set for students do not present sufficient challenge. Too few are challenged to make more than minimum expected progress. Senior leaders hold meetings with subject leaders about student progress; however, minutes of these meetings do not indicate that there is a strong enough analysis of what student data is telling them. Some actions for improvement are identified but there is little evidence in follow up minutes of a robust focus on whether actions are having any impact.
- Although leaders have put support in place to check that teachers' assessments are more accurate, the effectiveness of this support has not been fully evaluated and work in books is still being judged inaccurately. Teachers' marking is monitored, but the analysis is too superficial and is not picking up and challenging when teachers' expectations are not high enough.
- Leaders do not take into account a broad enough range of evidence when evaluating the quality of teaching. They place too much emphasis on performance in one-off lesson observations rather than considering what impact teachers' typical day-to-day practice is having on students' progress over time. As a result, leaders have not been quick enough to tackle teacher underperformance. Though training is in place to develop teaching practice, and a small number of teachers have support plans, both training and plans are too generic and do not meet the specific needs of individual teachers. Teachers have targets to improve their performance but they are not always rigorous or sufficiently focused on student progress.
- The promotion of equal opportunities across the academy is inadequate because, although all groups underachieve, the gaps between some groups such as those who are eligible for support through the pupil premium and those who are not are widening. The pupil premium funding is not having the required impact.
- Steps have been taken to ensure that students take an appropriate range of subjects to ensure that they make progress and have opportunities for the development of literacy skills. There is a range of extra-curricular opportunities available to students including in sports, art and music. Subject delivery is enhanced by a range of visitors and visits. This makes an effective contribution to students' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development.
- The sponsor has brokered support from a partner academy to assist with developing the quality of teaching; however, it is too early for the impact to be seen.
- It is strongly recommended that newly qualified teachers should not be appointed.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - While governors are committed to the academy and have tried to increase the levels of

challenge, particularly after the poor exam results in 2013, they do not have the necessary skills or knowledge to challenge effectively. They do not have an accurate view of how well the academy is performing, and think that achievement in particular is better than it is. They know how the pupil premium funding is spent, but are not able to evaluate its effectiveness. Nor are they aware of the types of targets which are being set for teachers and the impact of any training or support, or links with pay progression. They have tried to introduce systems for gaining first-hand knowledge of the academy through visits to observe teaching practice, but have found the success of these actions to be limited by lack of time. They take good care to ensure that safeguarding duties are met and that students are safe and secure around the building.

What inspection judgements mean

Academy		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding academy 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 academy 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	An academy that requires improvement is not yet a good academy, but it is not inadequate. This academy will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>An academy that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This academy will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>An academy that requires special measures is one where the academy is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the academy's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the academy. This academy will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

Academy details

Unique reference number	137582
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	430674

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

Type of academy	Secondary
Academy category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the academy roll	496
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Clayton
Headteacher	Matthew Wood
Date of previous academy inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01606 42515
Fax number	01606 46053
Email address	admin@UCANorthwich.org

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