

# City of London Academy – Islington

Prebend Street, Islington, London, N1 8PQ

**Inspection dates** 6–7 March 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- From low starting points, students make good and increasing rates of progress. Attainment is rising rapidly.
- The proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE grades A\* to C including English and mathematics has nearly doubled in the last year.
- Teaching is consistently good and some is outstanding.
- Behaviour is good. Clear systems are consistently applied and understood by all.
- Exclusions have fallen sharply. Attendance has improved and is now average.
- Students feel safe. Their parents and carers agree and are increasingly supportive of the academy's work.
- The sixth form is good. It is well led. Achievement and teaching are closely monitored. Programmes of study are tailored to students' individual needs.
- The Principal provides outstanding leadership. She has acted rapidly to improve achievement and teaching and has fully involved the senior team, subject leaders and governors.
- Subject leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning closely and are contributing very effectively to academy improvement.
- Governors know the school well through regular visits. They provide high levels of support and challenge any hint of underachievement.
- The academy's capacity for sustained improvement is very good. Everyone shares a strong belief in its ability to improve further.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small amount of teaching requires improvement. The amount of outstanding teaching is growing but is not yet high.
- Marking does not always help students to improve their work. Teachers do not make sure students respond to their guidance.
- Students are occasionally not challenged enough to ensure that they make rapid progress.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 37 lessons taught by 33 staff. Seven joint observations were carried out with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors listened to students reading. Inspectors also observed a range of activities offered by the academy to support individuals and small groups of students.
- The inspectors held meetings with the Principal, members of the governing body, staff, parents and four groups of students.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, inspectors took account of the six responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), the academy’s own surveys and responses to an inspection questionnaire from 95 staff.
- The inspectors observed the academy’s work. They also looked at the academy’s improvement plan, data on students’ attainment and progress, records of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, a wide range of policies and procedures, and the academy’s arrangements for the safeguarding of students.
- Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of students’ work, some jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- An inspector attended an assembly and visited the academy’s breakfast club.

## Inspection team

Michael Sutherland-Harper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Natasha Campbell	Additional Inspector
Patrick Walsh	Additional Inspector
Janet Allcorn	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The academy is sponsored by City University and the City of London Corporation. It has been an academy since 2008.
- Students from minority ethnic groups make up two thirds of the academy's population. The largest group in the academy are White British students, who make up about one third of the total. Just over half of the students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is almost double the national average.
- The proportion of students for whom the academy receives the pupil premium is almost three times the national average. This is additional government funding for particular groups of students, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, in the care of the local authority or from service families.
- A very small number of students follow alternative courses at Westminster Kingsway College.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school has a breakfast club.
- The Principal has been in post since September 2012.

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

- Make more teaching and learning outstanding by:
  - tailoring learning activities in lessons so that students are consistently stretched to reach the next levels at a faster rate
  - showing students through marking what they need to do next to improve their work, and checking that they apply the guidance provided.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- From consistently below-average starting points when they join the academy, students make good progress. Their writing skills are weak on entry, as is their grasp of number in mathematics. Additional funding in Year 7 is being used effectively to increase rates of progress in both areas, for example by laying on breakfast and additional lessons early in the morning to reinforce these skills. Achievement is meticulously tracked as students pursue their studies.
- The proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has risen rapidly. It rose from 33% in 2012 to 60% in 2013, matching the national average. Current data show that this trend is being maintained for 2014 and beyond. The academy has refined its checks on attainment and progress, and standards in all subjects, including humanities, which has traditionally been weaker, are now moving upwards rapidly.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. Standards are still below average on most courses, but students are making faster progress than previously. This improvement is being maintained through rigorous checks on progress and making sure students are taking the most appropriate courses. Retention rates are rising. Gaps between the attainment of different groups of students are narrowing. Students have opportunities to resit GCSE English and mathematics to obtain a C grade. A large percentage of the students go on to higher education.
- Students from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress and enjoy the same opportunities as their peers because the support provided for them is reviewed constantly. Teaching assistants receive extensive training to ensure they provide the support individual students need.
- Students are entered early for examinations in English, mathematics and core science. Those who enter the examinations early do better than those who take the examinations later. These students then go on to do statistics and additional or triple science in Year 11. An emphasis on key words and terms ensures that students make good progress in developing skills in literacy and numeracy.
- Students who follow courses elsewhere make similar progress to their peers. Their attendance, attainment and progress are regularly checked by senior members of staff and any issues are promptly followed up with individual students and their families.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because their needs are accurately identified. Support is then provided effectively at individual, group and classroom level.
- Students supported through the pupil premium make good progress. Any attainment gaps are now closing with increased rapidity. In English in 2013, eligible students in Year 11 were slightly ahead of other students in their GCSE results. The academy took prompt action when the gap in mathematics widened in 2013 to about a third of a grade behind. Current data show that the gap has narrowed again.
- Students have good reading skills. They have regular access to a well-stocked library and are expected to have a book with them at all times. Teachers hear them read in a range of lessons. Lessons regularly include a review of key words.

**The quality of teaching is good**

- The quality of teaching is improving. The academy's records show that the very small proportion of teaching that requires improvement is decreasing because of its refined checks on teaching quality. The academy's own reviews have led to focused staff training to enhance classroom practice. As a result of the improved quality of teaching, students are now making faster progress with their learning.
- Teachers show that they have high expectations and good subject knowledge, and enjoy good working relationships with students. They are especially good at bolstering the confidence of students and making them feel that they are capable of more than they thought. In a Year 8 geography lesson, for example, the teacher made clear the high level of work expected and used a range of stimulating resources to help students understand the impact of a hurricane on people's lives.
- More-able students are increasingly well catered for as part of the academy's focus on raising levels of challenge. Literacy and numeracy are taught effectively using innovative methods, such as calculating the angles needed to take a successful penalty in football. Specialised work with small groups and individuals helps to ensure that reading, writing, mathematics and communication skills are taught effectively. Regular sessions in all these skill areas contribute to the more rapid progress students are now making. Teachers make good use of technology to maintain students' interest.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. It is closely monitored to ensure that subjects are taught to a consistently high standard. The courses offered and the way they are taught help to ensure that students are well prepared for the world beyond the sixth form. Students say they have regular opportunities to assess their own and each other's work, and that teachers encourage them to be very ambitious in what they produce. Sixth-form students are themselves involved in helping younger students with their reading programmes.
- Teaching is not outstanding because students are not always presented with tasks that challenge them at the right level for their ability, so the progress they make towards the next levels of learning is held back.
- Students' work is marked regularly. However, marking does not always show students what they need to do next to help them take their work forward. Teachers do not always check that students have followed the detailed advice given, which means that mistakes are repeated and progress slows down.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- The behaviour of students is good. Students' behaviour in lessons and around the academy is calm and polite. Comments from teachers and teaching assistants are invariably supportive and help to promote good relationships. Parents interviewed during the inspection said that behaviour is much improved because positive behaviour is rewarded and expectations are clear.
- Students have increasingly positive attitudes to learning because of the clear expectations the academy now sets. These make a significant contribution to students' progress. Students present their work neatly. All groups spoken with during the inspection were positive that their studies would end successfully.
- Students feel that the systems now used to manage behaviour are consistent, fair and understood by everyone. They say they have had a significant effect in improving behaviour

throughout the academy. The house system offers competitive points for good behaviour. This encourages students not to let each other down by misbehaving. Members of the school council have a role in formulating academy rules.

- The academy operates a system of 'vertical tutoring' which encourages older students to take on responsibility for guiding younger ones. The pastoral system offers strong support to students. For example, teachers often spend time after school helping students with homework if needed. Sixth-form students are encouraged to develop their personal and social skills by helping others.
- Students say that there is zero tolerance of bullying. They are aware of the different forms of bullying such as racist and homophobic behaviour, and are taught about cyber bullying and how to avoid it. The academy's exclusion records show that bullying of any sort is taken extremely seriously and promptly acted upon. Students say categorically that an adult is always available to discuss and resolve any problems.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students feel safe and their parents agree. One parent described the academy now as being like 'a big family'. Policies and procedures are clear and up to date. Parents are kept well informed about changes.
- Attendance has improved this year and is now average. Persistent absence has halved in the last year. The academy attributes much of its success in this area to the employment of a permanent education welfare officer and to the whole-school approach to attendance and lateness which can result in an instant detention. The percentage of exclusions has reduced by a third and the number of incidents halved in the last year in line with the improvements in behaviour.

### **The leadership and management** are outstanding

- In the words of a number of those associated with the academy, the Principal provides 'inspirational' leadership. She has worked swiftly, highly effectively and with great determination to improve the quality of teaching and to raise achievement. The success of her efforts is borne out by the rapid improvement in all areas since her appointment. At the same time, the Principal knows the individuals in her care, whether staff or students, and takes care to encourage their work.
- The Principal is supported capably by other senior leaders, governors and staff in the work to drive the academy forward. The whole community feels that the vision of an outstanding academy is becoming a reality. This united approach, together with the trend of improvement in all year groups, indicates that the academy has a very good capacity for sustained improvement.
- Subject leaders have closely defined roles. They are expected to monitor results and teaching to a very high standard and are helped to do this by the academy's intensive collection and analysis of data on progress. Subject leaders have quickly embraced the culture of change. They do not wait for things to happen but take a lead in pushing them on. Targets and any areas that may be a barrier to progress are discussed at weekly meetings. Subject leaders have regular opportunities to develop their leadership skills further and in a whole-school context.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Leaders have quickly responded to the need to improve all aspects of the sixth form, including by providing more appropriate courses tailored to students' individual current and future needs. Students' attainment is continually assessed, and support is provided if progress slows. This includes guidance towards appropriate career pathways.

- Procedures for the management of staff performance have been reviewed. Staff have a simplified guidance sheet outlining expectations against the national *Teachers' Standards*. Performance is assessed closely against whole-academy, subject and personal targets. Good training and support ensure that there are no obstacles to staff development, and best practice is increasingly being shared between teachers and teaching assistants to raise the overall quality of teaching and learning.
- The range of subjects on offer is good. Review of existing provision for all year groups and forward planning for the new National Curriculum are at an advanced stage. Students' learning is enhanced through a wide range of clubs, links with local businesses and the academy sponsors, access to work experience placements and apprenticeships.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is good and promoted well across the range of subjects on offer. Regular activities, partnerships with the sponsors and the rich blend of nationalities in the academy contribute to students' understanding.
- Leaders seek to complement the academy's limited outdoor facilities by providing additional opportunities in different sports. The academy is developing links with various leagues to develop competitive sport and increase participation rates. Staff from several clubs and groups work closely with students. Students benefit from a superb dance studio and gymnasium.
- The academy maintains links with the local authority. The local authority recognises the improvement in the academy and the 'transformative work' done by the Principal and the senior team. Sponsors, many of whom are governors, are very supportive but also offer well-informed challenge.
- Links with parents are developing well. A number of parents came in during the inspection in response to an academy request. They expressed their support for the improvements taking place in behaviour, achievement and teaching, and for the continual focus on improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governance is a strength of the academy. Governors share a clear vision for giving students an all-round education that culminates in successful entry to, and completion of, higher education. They are highly knowledgeable about the academy through regular visits. These visits, and the personal background in education that many of them have, enable them to assess the quality of teaching accurately. Like the Principal, they are focused on raising achievement and the quality of teaching, assisted by increased training and clear career paths for staff. Systems for managing staff performance are rigorously applied and pay increases are only awarded where performance is good. Governors are appropriately trained in the use of performance data, and have a detailed understanding of what it is telling them. They have helped to bring about the rapid rate of improvement through the questions they ask and the targets set as part of the academy's improvement plan. Together with the senior leadership team, the governing body reviews the use of pupil premium funding regularly to ensure that it results, as at present, in higher achievement for eligible students. Governors are well trained in safeguarding procedures, including safer recruitment, and make sure they meet all current national requirements.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135587
<b>Local authority</b>	Islington
<b>Inspection number</b>	440653

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	669
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	98
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Eamon Martin
<b>Principal</b>	Clare Verga
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	22 November 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7226 8611
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