

Aston Academy

Aughton Road, Swallownest, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S26 4SF

Inspection dates

4–5 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students make good progress in their learning and achieve well. This is because most teaching is good and some is outstanding.
- Standards of attainment are high. The proportion of students in Year 11 gaining five or more GCSE subjects at grades A* to C is well above the national average.
- The behaviour of students around the academy is good. They have a positive attitude to learning and in most lessons show an enthusiasm to do well.
- The academy provides a safe learning environment for all students.
- The sixth form is good, not least because it is well led.
- The academy's commitment to ensuring that all students receive the best teaching and support possible permeates the work of all staff.
- The principal and her senior team provide highly effective leadership.
- The curriculum is a strength of the academy because it ensures that students have a range of academic, practical, and cultural experiences that prepare them well for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Governors know the academy well. They carefully check all aspects of the academy's work and, in this respect, provide effective support and challenge.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The achievement gap between those students who are eligible for the pupil premium and those who are not is not closing fast enough, especially in English.
- Policies to ensure outstanding teaching and outstanding progress are not yet having the desired impact because they are not being applied consistently across the academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 part lessons and intervention sessions, of which six were joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors observed senior leaders feeding back on the quality of learning and students' progress in lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, groups of students from all key stages, members of the governing body, including the Chair, and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also spoke with many students informally, in lessons and around the academy.
- Inspectors reviewed academy documentation, including information on students' progress, records relating to attendance and behaviour, the academy's development plans and evaluations, and documents relating to the management of teacher performance. They also looked at samples of students' work. The academy's central record of checks on staff was also scrutinised.
- Inspectors took into account 60 responses from parents from the Parent View website, as well as the academy's own survey of the views of parents. The inspection team also analysed the views of 113 members of staff and one parent, some of whom submitted written comments, and another parent who met with the lead inspector.

Inspection team

Michael Maddison, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Janet Pruchniewicz	Additional Inspector
Pamela Hemphill	Additional Inspector
Timothy Gartside	Additional Inspector
Judith Gooding	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Aston Comprehensive School converted to academy status in May 2011. When its predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2010, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The academy is much larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in care of the local authority, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children from service families, is average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below average, as is the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion who are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- A very small number of students are educated currently in off-site alternative provision at the Riverside Pupil Referral Unit. The academy is reviewing its use of this provision.
- The academy meets the government's current floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Students are entered early for GCSE examinations when it is appropriate.
- The principal is a National Leader of Education and also executive principal of Thurcroft Junior Academy, which is part of the Aston Community Education Trust.
- The academy is a specialist academy for mathematics and computing.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching through the more consistent application of policies, in particular ensuring that all teachers are equally effective in:
 - giving regular attention to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills and especially their oracy skills
 - improving students' presentation of their work in their books
 - ensuring that marking and feedback have a direct impact on students' learning and progress
 - ensuring that unacceptable behaviour displayed by a small number of students in lessons, as well as on corridors, is always challenged and dealt with appropriately.
- Ensure that the gaps in achievement, especially in English, between those students who are eligible for the pupil premium and those who are not narrow at a much faster rate.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement is good. It is not yet outstanding because the gap between those students who are eligible for the pupil premium and those who are not is not closing fast enough, especially in English. In addition, student progress in some key subjects is not yet sufficiently or consistently above average.
- The proportion of students in Year 11 gaining five or more GCSE subjects at grades A* to C is high and well above the national average. Students attain well in their GCSE examinations because most have positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do well, and much of the teaching is at least good.
- The most able students achieve well. However, the academy is working hard to ensure that they do even better and that there is an increase in the proportion of students reaching grades A* and A at GCSE.
- The latest assessments of performance suggest that students in Year 11 are on track to attain good results this year.
- For the past three years the achievement gap in relation to expected progress in English and mathematics between those students who are eligible for the pupil premium and those who are not eligible has been marked and has hardly narrowed.
- Although the proportion of pupil premium students making expected progress in mathematics is expected to be much higher this year, this is unlikely to be the case in English. Overall, the gaps in both subjects are too wide and are not being closed quickly enough. Academy leaders are aware of this and are taking steps to improve the progress of these students.
- Inspectors observed students making good, and sometimes outstanding, progress in lessons. However, this was not always the case. On occasions, students did not make sufficient progress because, invariably, they were not challenged in their learning.
- The achievement of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is improving and overall they make good progress. This is due to some well-targeted and high quality work by their teachers and by other adults who support them.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. This is because students have highly positive attitudes to learning and respond well to the generally good and outstanding teaching they receive.
- The few students who are educated in off-site alternative provision are closely monitored and make expected progress.
- Students are entered early for GCSE examinations if it is appropriate and, in recent years, this approach has successfully motivated students in English and mathematics.
- Students achieve well or better when opportunities are readily taken to develop their reading, writing, communication and mathematics skills. However, these skills, and especially students' oracy skills, are not being developed systematically in all subjects.
- Overall, students at the academy are being prepared successfully for the next stage of their education, employment and training.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching is good and some is outstanding. This ensures that students' progress overall is good. As a result, students achieve well.
- Teachers' expectations of what students should achieve in lessons are usually high. Clear planning of learning supports the demanding expectations many teachers have of students. However, in some lessons observed, teachers do not have high enough expectations and fail to provide students with work which challenges them and allows them to make sufficient progress.
- Students' progress is good or better, especially in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, when teachers use their good subject knowledge through effective questioning to probe students' thinking and

develop their understanding. Although this is not yet the case across the academy, there is a core of good and outstanding teaching in all key stages which promotes effective learning, develops positive relationships and allows students to make a strong contribution to their own learning and progress.

- Whereas many teachers focus on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, some fail to take the opportunities provided in their teaching. In particular, they do not help students to develop their oracy skills by encouraging them to answer in sentences or with detailed explanations.
- Teachers' comments in marking help students to understand what they have done well. However, their feedback does not always have a direct impact on students' learning and progress. This is because not all teachers provide students with targets through the 'even better if' approach which allows students to respond. Where it is used effectively, the 'right to respond' strategy enables students to show how they have used teachers' comments to strengthen their learning. However, this is not happening consistently across the academy.
- Most students take pride in their work and their books are well presented. However, a number of teachers do not routinely demand from all students the highest standards of presentation of their work in their books.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Evidence from parents and students suggests that the good behaviour seen during the inspection is typical of the behaviour of students over time.
- Students commented that they get on well together and that behaviour out of lessons is generally good. Students reported, and inspectors observed, some boisterous behaviour at lesson change-over times, especially at locations in the academy where high numbers of students wished to pass through areas where staircases and corridors converged. Staff are deployed at these points and senior leaders are aware of the importance of ensuring smooth transitions at all times of the day.
- The academy has clear procedures for dealing with poor behaviour and students noted that they are applied by most teachers. However, the unacceptable behaviour displayed by a small number of students in lessons, as well as on corridors, is not always challenged and dealt with appropriately. In lessons this inappropriate behaviour occurred when students were not sufficiently challenged in their work.
- Most students, especially those in the sixth form, have positive attitudes to learning. They are keen to do well and enjoy working together. They are friendly and were keen to share their views of the academy with the inspection team.
- Attendance has improved in recent years and is broadly average. The academy has also taken action to reduce the number of students who arrive late.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe and good arrangements for those attending off-site alternative provision seek to ensure their safety while off academy premises.
- Vulnerable students are supported well in their learning. The academy is rightly proud of its work to provide appropriate support and guidance for all students and especially those who face personal difficulties.
- Students know about different types of bullying, such as cyber, racist and homophobic bullying and how to keep safe when using the internet. They were clear that bullying is rare and that when it occurs it is dealt with promptly and effectively by staff. Students spoke highly of the use of restorative justice strategies to help resolve disputes between students.
- Students participate in and enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular provision including visits, sport, music and drama activities and clubs. Many of these take place at lunchtime. These opportunities effectively enrich students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as does the academy's long-standing link with Makunduchi Secondary School, Zanzibar.
- In the sixth form, attendance is good and improving, and the number of students who stay on

into Year 13 is also improving. Students respect one another and support young students with their reading and as peer mentors.

The leadership and management are good

- The principal has high expectations of staff and students, and she is supported well in this by senior and middle leaders and governors. Together they provide purposeful leadership and have established a highly successful academy which currently has good achievement and good teaching.
- The academy is rightly focused on ensuring that all students who attend it deserve to receive the best teaching and support so that they can achieve the highest grades. This belief permeates the work of all staff. Middle leaders, for example, are clear about their roles and are well-focused on improving standards in the areas for which they are responsible.
- Senior leaders have a good grasp of the strengths and areas for improvement across the academy. They have a thoughtful and coherent approach to academy improvement which has already brought considerable benefits, notably in students' attainment and achievement. Self-evaluation is thorough but it is generous in its assessment.
- Whole academy systems for monitoring and evaluating the performance of staff and the effectiveness of their teaching are in place. They enable senior leaders to gauge the success of staff in their work in relation to the quality of their teaching and the impact they have on students' achievement.
- The 'Learning and Teaching Agreement' sets down clear and agreed guidelines for all staff. However, they are not being consistently applied across the academy. As a result, they are not having the full impact desired on, for example, developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, and on improving students' presentation of their work in their books and the impact of marking and feedback on students' learning.
- Nevertheless, the effectiveness of senior leaders' actions, and their awareness of and determination to close the gap between the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium funding and those who are not, provide strong evidence of the capacity of senior leaders and governors to bring about further improvement.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is having a positive impact on raising students' achievement. Teaching is monitored and the performance of staff is managed well and appropriately linked to the Teachers' Standards. Monitoring information is used to make sure that there is a fair approach to pay progression for staff.
- Leaders have taken appropriate action to address weaker teaching and, through the creative work of the Developing Excellence Team, they have provided focused professional development for staff.
- The safety and welfare of all students are a high priority and safeguarding procedures meet current requirements. Procedures to ensure equality of opportunity for all are good and the academy rejects discrimination in all its forms.
- The curriculum is a strength of the academy because it ensures that individuals have a range of academic, practical, and cultural experiences that prepare them well for the next stage of their education. It is being adapted successfully to meet current national reforms.
- Outcomes for students in the sixth form are good. This is due to the good teaching, the good range of courses that are appropriate for students and the high level of support and guidance which are provided. It is also because of the highly effective leadership of the vice principal who is responsible for this aspect of the academy's provision.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors know the academy well through a system of committees and monitoring procedures. They have high ambitions for students' achievement and personal development.
 - They regularly discuss the academy's performance data and provide effective challenge for senior leaders. They keep a close watch on the impact the pupil premium funding is having on improving outcomes for eligible students and are aware that the achievement gap between

those who are eligible for funding and those who are not is too wide.

- Governors are knowledgeable, not least because the Chair of the Governing Body is a National Leader of Governance. In addition, members of the governing body take a leading role in the Aston Community Education Trust.
- Governors are kept up-to-date on the progress that all departments are making and effectively challenge leaders and managers at all levels.
- Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching and performance management. They scrutinise pay-progression data and are fully aware of how salary progression is linked to outcomes for students. They apply a rigorous process to the management of the principal's performance and are involved in the decisions when some staff are refused increases in pay if they have not met their targets.
- Governors are diligent in ensuring that all safeguarding policies and practices are up-to-date and meet requirements so that students and staff work in a safe environment.

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	136718
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	440906

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 converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1611
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Barton
Headteacher	Eunice Newton
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2010
Telephone number	0114 2872171
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