

University Academy Liverpool

Dingle Vale, Liverpool, Merseyside, L8 9SJ

Inspection dates

12–13 March 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. Standards, particularly in English and mathematics, are too low and improvements are not being made quickly enough. Too few students are making or exceeding the progress expected of them from their different starting points.
- The overall effectiveness of the academy's sixth form is inadequate. Pass rates in some subjects are too low. Attendance in the sixth form is low.
- As a result of weak teaching over time, too many students are underachieving, including those who are most-able.
- Staff absence contributes to variability in the quality of students' behaviour and safety.
- The curriculum is not planned well enough to meet the full range of students' needs.
- Leadership and management are inadequate. The academy's view of its own performance is too generous, as are leaders' evaluations of the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning. The governing body does not always have sufficiently reliable information from which to hold all leaders fully to account.
- The ability of the leadership to secure improvement without considerable support and challenge is limited. There is too much inconsistency in the skills of senior leaders.
- Insufficient progress in improving students' outcomes has been made since the academy opened.

The school has the following strengths

- There are strengths in students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The academy provides a positive and supportive community for students from a wide range of different nationalities and backgrounds.
- An emphasis on the importance of developing students' literacy skills, including through reading books is successfully reducing gaps between students' reading ages on entry to the academy and their actual age, especially in Years 7 and 8.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, of which 6 were joint observations with senior staff. Most of these covered full 50-minute periods of 'double lessons'. Inspectors also took groups of students out towards the end of the lesson to discuss their work and their experiences of the academy. Other shorter observations also took place and several tutorial sessions were seen.
- Meetings were held with leaders, staff and members of the governing body including representatives of the Academy Trust.
- Records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding were checked, along with a wide range of other documentation which included: self-evaluation and development planning, information about students' progress, performance management arrangements and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors scrutinised samples of work completed by a selection of Year 11 students in English and mathematics.
- The inspection team also took into account the views of the 29 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Marguerite Murphy, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Additional Inspector
Rebecca Lawton	Additional Inspector
Paul Latham	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

- University Academy Liverpool is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. It opened in June 2012, replacing the predecessor school Shorefields Technology College.
- There are significantly more boys than girls in the academy.
- Approximately half the students are of White British heritage, with other students coming from a diverse range of minority ethnic groups. Almost half of students speak English as an additional language.
- A very high proportion of students (85%) are supported by the pupil premium. This is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children of those who are serving in the armed forces and those children that are looked after by the local authority.
- The academy does not make use of any additional off-site provision for any of its students.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is just above average. The proportion of those supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average.
- Since the academy opened, a significantly above average proportion of students has arrived at or left the academy at other than the usual times.
- The academy enters students for some GCSE examinations earlier than usual.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or outstanding so that students make at least good progress that is sustained over time and standards rise throughout the academy, especially in English and mathematics, by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of information on students' previous learning and build on this more effectively to increase the progress they make in lessons and over time
 - raising expectations of what students are capable of achieving, particularly boys, those who are most able and those whose first language is not English
 - using homework, marking and verbal feedback consistently and effectively to stretch students to achieve more and improve the presentation of their work
 - developing further students' speaking and listening skills across the curriculum, for example, through effective questioning to promote more extended responses that demonstrate their understanding
 - reducing levels of staff absence.
- Improve the impact of leadership and its ability to secure improvements across the academy, including in the sixth form, by:
 - increasing the rigour and accuracy of the academy's self-evaluation and quality assurance

- procedures, including the use of information on the performance of all cohorts of students
 - holding all those in leadership positions fully to account for the impact of their work on students' achievement and on the performance of other staff at all levels
 - ensuring that staff fully understand and subscribe to the leadership's vision for the academy's improvement, including its proposals for a staffing restructure to maintain its financial viability
 - developing further the skills of the governing body to understand and use data effectively to ask more searching questions about the achievement of different groups of students
 - reviewing the quality and range of subjects that the academy provides in order to better meet the interests and needs of all students.
- Improve students' behaviour so that it makes a more positive contribution to their progress, by:
- eliminating any off-task misbehaviour in lessons and tutorial times by encouraging students to take more responsibility for their own good attitudes to learning, whether or not they are with their regular teachers
 - increasing students' levels of interest and involvement in lessons, and promoting a love of learning
 - further raising students' attendance, particularly in the sixth form.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.

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

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

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- From their well below average starting points, students' progress over time, particularly in English and mathematics, is inadequate. In 2013, only one-third of students attained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. This is significantly below the national average.
- The vast majority of students at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2013 were known to be eligible for free school meals. Their attainment in English and mathematics was below that of similar students nationally. It was also, on average, one GCSE grade below that of the small minority of students in the academy who are not supported by the pupil premium.
- Attainment in the sixth form is low, including for those students who are re-sitting GCSE examinations in English and mathematics. Students' current rates of progress remain below average, both for the very small number who are studying at A Level and for those taking vocational qualifications, such as BTEC Level 3 Diplomas.
- Attainment in some subjects is nearer to national averages at grades A* to C in GCSE, such as in art and design, Spanish, some aspects of design technology, communication studies and additional science.
- Around 40 per cent of students do not speak English as their first language. Some arrive into different year groups at various points in the year, on occasions with limited understanding of English. By the time they leave, the attainment of students who speak English as an additional language remains significantly lower than that of their peers nationally because they make insufficient progress.
- Too many students do not make the progress expected of them in English and mathematics from their starting points. This is the typical picture across most groups of students, whether or not they are known to be eligible for free school meals. The exception in 2013 was that students who entered with low prior attainment or had special educational needs supported at school action made similar progress to their peers nationally in English. However, those supported at school action plus made less progress than others nationally in English and mathematics.
- Too much variability remains in the learning and progress currently of students who are disabled or have special educational needs. As a result, their overall achievement is inadequate.
- Less than half of the most-able students made sufficient progress to attain the grades expected of them in the 2013 examinations in English and mathematics. The academy has plans in place to raise expectations and standards for this group, particularly for boys, although there is limited evidence of improvement so far in students' current work. It remains the case that very few students in Year 11 are on target to reach the higher grades of which they should be capable.
- The progress students make in lessons is too variable. Although more are making good progress currently, this has not been the case over time and is still not evident in enough classes and subjects to make up lost ground.
- The vast majority of last year's Year 11 cohort was entered for mathematics GCSE at the end of Year 10. For some, this limited their potential by 'settling for a grade C' when they were capable of more than this.
- In a more positive development, a small group of most-able mathematics students were entered early for their mathematics GCSE in Year 9. Four of these students gained an A* grade and one achieved grade A.
- The academy has a strong focus on improving students' reading skills. This is promoted through a good range of books, information and communication technology resources and an attractive library environment. Improvements in the reading ages of particular groups of younger students, for example, have been evident as a result of the academy's work in this area, some of which has been supported by 'catch up' funding.
- Work to improve students' literacy skills, including across other subjects, has made a promising start. However, it can be affected adversely by a lack of balance in the curriculum when too

many double lessons in the literacy-focused 'Project Based Learning' take place and students find it hard to maintain interest or concentration. Insufficient opportunities are provided for students to develop their mathematical skills across other subjects.

- Students' fluency in spoken language is not being improved at a fast enough rate, regardless of whether their first language is English. This is also reflected in the quality of their written work, with too many weaknesses in the use of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- The impact of teaching over time is inadequate. The quality of teaching is not good enough to enable students to make the rapid progress needed to close the gaps between their attainment and that of students nationally.
- Weak teaching has been exacerbated by the inaccurate assessments of what students know and can do. Since this was identified as a problem during a detailed review commissioned by the Academy Trust in the autumn term, changes have been made by the academy to the way in which it measures the progress students make. However, this is relatively new and teachers do not always use this information effectively to ensure that different groups of students achieve equally well.
- In too many lessons, there is insufficient challenge to students, and expectations of what they can achieve are pitched too low. Questioning is not used consistently well to promote speaking and listening nor to check exactly how well students understand what they are doing and why. Consequently, some students 'switch off' or take too much of a laid-back approach to their work, and make too little progress.
- There is little to suggest that students are encouraged to take pride in their work because it is often incomplete or poorly presented in their books.
- A push on developing the quality and impact of teachers' marking is not yet leading to sufficient improvement. In the better examples, teachers provide good feedback on the strengths and areas to be improved in students' work. There are fewer examples of students' responses to the marking or of teachers following it up in subsequent lessons to check that suggested improvements have been made.
- Students are not always encouraged to make good use of their planners to help organise themselves and be better prepared for lessons. Homework is not set regularly enough nor followed up in class. Some students who spoke with inspectors did not have a clear understanding of the expectations for completion of homework.
- In some lessons teachers are beginning to make effective use of ways in which they can plan for and support the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills across other subjects. Teachers take opportunities to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in lessons, tutorials and other planned activities. Relationships between staff and students are mostly very positive and make a good contribution to students' behaviour and attitudes to learning in the majority of lessons.
- Students' learning is of a high quality in a small proportion of lessons. For example, higher-ability Year 9 students were enthused by the skilful teaching of an aspect of theoretical mathematics, making excellent progress in their understanding of the topic.
- Some teachers demonstrate their own interest and enthusiasm for their subjects and this rubs off on the students. In a Year 12 lesson, students preparing to re-sit their GCSE English examinations made good progress in their understanding of the elements of effective narrative in their writing.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. This is because their attitudes towards learning are not consistently positive and do not have a good enough impact on their progress.

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. The number of fixed-term exclusions is above average. These are being reduced over time, however, and the vast majority of students who spoke to inspectors say they feel safe.
- Most students are polite and courteous to each other, staff and visitors. They have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying and report that should any instances occur they could be reported and resolved. The majority of students who spoke with inspectors consider that behaviour is typically good in the academy, but also say that it could be better at times.
- Students wear their uniform correctly and the majority display a sense of pride in their academy. Classrooms are generally tidy and resources are valued, including the building itself, which does not suffer from vandalism or have a problem with litter.
- A small minority of students are dependent on the direct management of their behaviour or sanctions to ensure that low-level disruption does not affect the learning of others. This was evident during some tutorial sessions and in a very small number of lessons. Most students behave in an orderly manner in corridors, shared areas and dining facilities and very few need to be reminded of the importance of this.
- In the last academic year, a higher than-average proportion of students had lower than 85 per cent attendance. For some groups, this was more of an issue, for example, girls and those with special educational needs supported at school action. Although the attendance of those students of Gypsy/Roma heritage was low, it was higher than that seen nationally for the same group. The academy's hard work to improve attendance has resulted in some reduction in students' absence rates, although attendance remains below average overall.
- The responses to Parent View indicate that those parents who completed the survey feel that their children are well cared for, enjoy school and feel safe.

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Leaders are failing to accelerate the slow rates of improvement in students' outcomes. Too many students are underachieving over time and standards are not rising quickly enough. The leadership of the sixth form is also inadequate and has been affected by a previous long-term sickness absence.
- There is too much variability in the quality of senior leadership and the academy's purpose and vision does not appear to be consistently articulated and shared by all staff. There are discrepancies in the way key policies are carried out or understood by leaders and teachers. Morale is low in some respects, particularly among support staff who are most likely to be affected by a proposed staffing restructure.
- The Principal is struggling to gain the full support of all staff, due in part to the necessary speed at which changes are having to be made in response to financial constraints. She is well supported by the governing body and the Academy Trust, but has insufficient strengths to draw on from other senior leaders to drive improvements forward more rapidly.
- The leadership's capacity to improve the academy is inadequate. A number of staffing issues have yet to be resolved and key leadership roles and responsibilities are not carried out as effectively as they should be. In addition, much time and energy over a significant period has been taken up with trying to resolve differences between the academy's management and local professional associations.
- The academy's evaluation of the quality of teaching is overgenerous because it has not focused rigorously enough on the impact of teaching on students' learning over time. There are mixed views about the quality and usefulness of the Wednesday afternoon professional development sessions for staff. Although underperforming staff have been challenged and several have left the academy since it opened, performance management has not been rigorous enough in setting targets linked to students' rates of progress.
- There are early signs of improvement in the development of middle leadership skills, for example, in mathematics, English and literacy. Subject leaders have a general understanding of what needs to be done to improve provision, but it is too early to see the impact of their actions

on improving students' achievement.

- Work has begun to develop the academy's quality assurance procedures and this is showing promise, for example, in starting to put more rigour into assessing and tracking the progress of particular groups or cohorts of students. However, there is much ground still to be made up in this aspect, because leaders cannot always provide accurate and reliable information in response to key questions about students' current performance.
- The academy plans and tracks the spending of its substantial allocation of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding and there are examples of its positive impact on improvements in attendance and reading ages.
- Discrimination of any form is rare and taken seriously, so students are encouraged to report any instances so that they can be tackled.
- Although the academy is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunities for all its diverse range of student groups, this is not sufficiently demonstrated by improving teaching and achievement for all groups of students. The curriculum does not always meet students' needs and interests. Not all students are happy with the relatively narrow range of course choices and combinations that are available to them.
- Arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.
- The academy's sponsors have put in place and funded several arrangements to support leaders and teachers, including training and advice. The review commissioned by the sponsors in October 2013 was helpful in identifying early signs of improvement and the most urgent priorities for future development. This has informed changes to the academy's improvement plans, although these are overly complex in places and not specific enough in linking to teachers' performance management targets.
- Inspectors strongly recommend that the academy should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know enough about the academy's performance and students' achievement to recognise that it was at risk of being judged inadequate. They were also aware that the management of information on the progress made by different groups of students had until quite recently been inadequate. As the information becomes more reliable, the governing body recognises the need to increase its understanding of how this should be checked against leaders' views of the quality of teaching and achievement.
 - The governing body challenges leaders and meets regularly to discuss progress and hold the Principal to account through performance management arrangements. Appropriate arrangements for staff appraisal have been introduced to ensure that teachers' pay and progression through the salary scale are linked to performance, because in the past not enough consideration has been given to teachers' impact on students' achievements.
 - Minutes of the governing body meetings show a good level of challenge and questioning. Governors are reviewing the cost of the academy's internal 'Language School' provision against its impact on the progress made by students whose first language is not English. Governors know about how pupil premium funds are spent. They consider that the use of graduate mentors is having the most positive impact on students' personal development and knowledge of their academic targets.

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	137675
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	408826

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	609
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Catherine Anderson
Principal	Alison Dearden
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0151 727 1387
Fax number	0151 728 9805
Email address	admin@ualiverpool.org

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