

Pool Academy

Church Road, Pool, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 3PZ

Inspection dates

1–2 April 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	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The principal, leaders and governors have been highly successful in establishing the academy as a school which is improving quickly.
- Senior leaders have introduced initiatives which have ensured that GCSE results have improved faster than nationally.
- The academy's values of aspiration, belonging and respect are well embedded in everyday practice.
- Students are encouraged to be responsible. They develop a good understanding of their own achievements and are motivated to aim high and do well.
- Behaviour is consistently positive which helps makes the academy pleasant and orderly. Students feel safe and enjoy learning and socialising together.
- Teaching is good over time and some is outstanding. Teachers identify any students at risk of falling behind at an early stage and give them help to catch up quickly.
- Students make very good use of their new hand-held tablets to store work and research information which boosts their learning.
- The curriculum is flexible and innovative so that it is very effective in meeting students' needs and promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leadership and management are outstanding and systems to manage staff performance and tackle any weaknesses are robust. The academy is very well placed to improve further.
- Governors have an excellent understanding of the academy's performance and use this information to challenge it to do even better.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Marking is variable and there are not enough opportunities for students to follow up immediately on their teachers' advice.
- Students do not always present their work well because improving presentation is not emphasised enough by teachers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons, 10 of which were joint observations with members of the senior leadership group.
- Meetings were held with two student groups, with academy leaders and staff, as well as with representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at a range of documents, including those that show how the academy checks on how well it is doing, plans for future development and students’ progress data. They scrutinised students’ work, information about how the academy cares for and protects students, records relating to behaviour and attendance, and minutes of recent governing body meetings.
- The inspection team took account of 100 responses to the online Parent View survey and additional comments made a few parents, together with questionnaires completed by 113 staff.

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
John Mallone	Additional Inspector
Joseph Skivington	Additional Inspector
Phil Taylor	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Pool Academy converted to become an academy school in April 2011. When its predecessor school, Pool Business and Enterprise College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- It is an average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are of White British heritage, with a wide range of other backgrounds represented in small numbers.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is increasing but is below average.
- The proportion of students supported through additional funding is average. This is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after by the local authority and children of service families.
- Although this varies from year to year, around one in eight students in Years 7 and 8 benefits from the nationally-funded catch-up programme.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The proportion supported at school action is high.
- In the past, the academy has entered students for some GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11. Currently, some students take English and science GCSE examinations in Year 10.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- As part of their option choices, some students in Years 10 and 11 attend vocational courses at Cornwall College, adjacent to the academy, for two sessions each week.
- Currently, eight students follow individually-tailored off-site programmes of study at Trevithick Court, Truro College or Acorn Academy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching and learning outstanding so that all groups of students make even faster progress, by:
 - ensuring that the best practice in marking is consistently implemented across the academy so that students are clear about how their work can be improved, and that they have enough opportunities to test out the advice given in their teachers' written marking
 - giving students more advice about the presentation of their work so that their written work gives them a clear record of their learning and day-to-day achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- All groups of students, including the more able, achieve well because the progress of individual students is monitored closely. Students not making the progress necessary to reach their end of year targets are given prompt, extra support to improve quickly. This shows the academy's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all students and means that they are prepared well for the next stage in their lives. Almost all students enter further education, employment or training on leaving the academy.
- The overall attainment of students when they join the academy is broadly in line with the national average. However, fewer students now in Key Stage 4 had reached the standards expected in English and mathematics at the end of their primary school than was the case nationally. Students make good, and sometimes very good, progress throughout their time in the academy, and GCSE standards in the last three years have been broadly average from students' below average starting points when they joined the academy.
- The proportion of students who gained five GCSE passes at grade C or above, including in English and mathematics, rose between 2011 and 2013 at a much faster pace than nationally.
- For the last two years, students did not make as rapid progress in mathematics and science as they did in English. The academy's tracking information shows that progress rates are now more even, showing good achievement across all these subjects. For example, more students are exceeding the nationally-expected progress in mathematics than previously, bringing achievement in mathematics into line with English.
- The academy identifies those students who are entered for the different GCSE examinations before Year 11 carefully to ensure that they achieve the grades of which they are capable. They are given another chance to achieve their target grades if they do not achieve these on the first occasion.
- Literacy skills are promoted well in subjects other than English. Students express themselves clearly and explain their thinking, for example when making presentations to their classmates. Students research and find out information for themselves very effectively, which help their learning across all their courses.
- Students who enter the academy with literacy and numeracy skills that are below those expected for their age receive effective additional support to help them to catch up with their peers. Students gain confidence because of the sharp focus on requiring students to read.
- The academy is now effectively supporting students who are eligible for support through additional funding. The gap between their performance and that of others is narrowing. The GCSE attainment of the group has fluctuated from year to year because of the differing circumstances and abilities of students, some of whom had been in the academy for a very short time before taking their examinations. In 2013 the gap opened during the previous year to over a grade in English and a grade and a half in mathematics. The gap currently for Year 11 students is less than a grade in both subjects and is considerably less than this in other year groups.
- Disabled students, those who have special educational needs and the small number who speak English as an additional language achieve well. Students make a positive transition into the academy as a result of the close relationships and range of activities run jointly with primary schools. They are given work which is matched well to their needs and abilities. Learning facilitators are deployed effectively to give good support which helps students to participate fully in the classroom activities.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students benefit from teaching which is typically good, with examples of outstanding practice across the academy. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and use this to plan lessons which interest and engage students. Consequently, students make good or better progress.

- Teaching has many strengths, including warm relationships with students which encourage positive attitudes to learning. Teachers have high aspirations and consistently challenge students of all abilities by making it clear to them how to work at a higher level. For example, in a mathematics lesson on angles in polygons for a group of students who find learning difficult, the teacher set a series of well-pitched challenges. These encouraged students to move on to more difficult work with no loss of time when it was clear that they had mastered the concept.
- Teachers' planning is detailed, with a sharp focus on giving students work which builds quickly on their current attainment. In a Year 11 sociology lesson, students were given clear indicators of the requirements for higher GCSE grades and tasks to follow up on areas which could be improved. Students make good use of their hand-held tablets to build their own revision guides for later reference, developing their study skills well.
- These strengths in ensuring that students work at levels which challenge them are reflected in the 'rich curriculum' lessons, which give individuals opportunities to go over work which they find difficult or to accelerate their progress by working in higher-attaining groups.
- Teachers question students well to monitor students' progress through the lesson and adapt their approaches accordingly. Teachers ensure that students think things through for themselves and promote communication skills very well by requiring full and articulate responses.
- Some teachers model how work should be presented and give clear guidance about how presentation improves the quality of students' work, but this is not consistent across the academy. Consequently, day-to-day handwriting and written work are sometimes untidy which leads to students not necessarily having clear records of their achievements. By contrast, teachers give a strong focus to examination technique for those students approaching external examinations.
- There are many examples of high quality marking, particularly of tests and summary pieces of work. Teachers encourage a helpful dialogue with students through the use of 'Even Better If' (EBI) statements. Where students are given dedicated time to show how they have considered their teachers' comments, this has a significant impact on the progress they make. The identification of EBIs is embedded across the academy, but there are inconsistencies in the way these are followed up. Consequently, students do not have enough opportunities to test out the advice given by their teachers' written marking, for example by carrying out additional work to check that they understand the comments made by their teacher.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Students behave well in lessons, when moving between lessons and at break and lunch times. Most students agree that behaviour is good and that the sanctions used for inappropriate behaviour are fair, and their parents agree.
- Students show respect and courtesy to one another, so that the academy operates as a cohesive community. There is a pleasant and orderly atmosphere around the academy, including in narrow corridors and stairways. Students take good care of their own and academy property, including their hand-held tablets, and the site is free of litter and graffiti.
- In class, students have positive attitudes. They are keen to do well and respond willingly to their teachers' instructions. They work collaboratively so that effective group work is a feature of many lessons, with students consolidating their thinking by discussing issues together. In a lesson involving a mock trial, students showed their keen capacity to resolve conflict and understanding of ethical issues. Even so, in a few lessons, some time is lost because the teacher has to wait for students to pay attention.
- The high take-up of extra-curricular activities shows students' enjoyment of academy life. The volunteering initiative is valued and gives excellent opportunities for community involvement. For example, students undertake volunteer work in the local community and support local radio broadcasts, developing students' personal commitment and understanding of citizenship.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say that they feel very safe in the academy and when attending courses at the local college. They know how to keep themselves safe, and have a very clear understanding of potential danger when using the internet and social networking sites.

- Students know about different forms of bullying, such as the use of racist or homophobic language and the impact of persistent name calling. The academy's records show that incidents of bullying are declining year on year. Students know that any form of discrimination is not tolerated and most believe that when incidents occur they are dealt with effectively.
- Attendance is average. The academy has been particularly successful in reducing the numbers of students who are persistently absent, to levels in line with those nationally.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Outstanding leadership and management have ensured that leaders and managers have established the academy with firm foundations so that it is well placed to look to the future with confidence. Already there have been significant improvements in students' achievements and attendance.
- A real strength of the academy is the quality of teamwork and commitment of all staff, including support and site staff, resulting in a shared vision for improvement.
- There is a well-developed culture of self-evaluation and consistency in implementing agreed policy. Self-evaluation is robust and carried out at all levels of leadership and management.
- Leaders have a collaborative approach to improving teaching. This is based on a clear understanding and sharing of best practice, seen in the high expectations evident during the joint observations undertaken with senior leaders during the inspection. Teachers' professional development is related to whole-school and individual needs. Teachers' progression up the salary scale is closely linked to the impact of their teaching on students' achievements.
- Systems to check students' progress are very effective, ensuring that any potential underachievement is picked up and addressed quickly. This makes a strong contribution to the even progress that all groups of students make through their time in the academy.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Students have a wide range of academic and vocational courses for Key Stage 3 study. They have good advice on how to raise their aspirations, seen in the rapid increase of those taking courses across the English Baccalaureate range of subjects. The innovative 'rich curriculum' promotes challenge and raises achievement. It has a very strong impact in developing and reinforcing literacy and numeracy skills early in students' time in the academy, whilst giving choice for older students to accelerate their progress in subjects of their own choice. The many additional sessions after the academy day enable students to seek further help and guidance from staff, strengthening their own study skills in preparation for the next stage of their lives.
- The academy uses external consultants to support its self-evaluation. Most recently, middle leaders have developed their lesson observation skills effectively. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and use this information to plan effectively for academy development, for example recognising that approaches to assessment are not fully embedded in practice across the academy.
- Arrangements for ensuring the safety of students and adults meet statutory requirements, including when students are taught by other providers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body shares senior leaders' uncompromising drive to achieve the highest possible levels of achievement for students. Their vision is strongly focused on improvement. Governors contribute to, and help to shape, improvement priorities very effectively because they have a clear understanding of how the academy is doing and what still needs to be improved. They know about the quality of teaching and how well students achieve. They ensure that salary progression is warranted. The governing body is very challenging of the academy, especially students' performance and how additional funding is closing gaps in performance. Governors ensure financial probity and are taking decisions necessary to ensure ongoing security during a time of projected decreasing numbers of students within the area. Governors attend training to help them to improve the effectiveness of governance.

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	136614
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	441258

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	918
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Acting Chair	Jo Gill
Principal	Zelma Hill
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01209 712220
Fax number	01209 612070
Email address	zh@poolacademy.co.uk

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