

Top Valley Academy

Top Valley Drive, Top Valley, Nottingham, NG5 9AZ

Inspection dates

30 April – 1 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' progress in English and mathematics is too slow. Early entry to GCSE and the focus on achieving a C grade have limited the number of top grades.
- Students' reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills are not developing strongly enough from their entry into Year 7.
- Not enough teaching is engaging, exciting and challenging. This affects students' attitudes to learning.
- In a small number of lessons, there is low-level disruption. Not all teachers follow the academy's agreed behaviour management code.
- The academy's improvement plan does not detail the precise steps to be taken to improve achievement. Milestones are not set to check progress.
- Senior leaders' efforts to improve teaching have not yet had sufficient time to make an impact on all groups of learners. Some low-ability students do not make enough progress.
- Leadership, other than from the senior team, is underdeveloped.
- Governors do not monitor the effectiveness of additional funding to support students eligible for the pupil premium.

The school has the following strengths

- The academy's current data reflects a recent improvement in progress, particularly for younger students.
- The safety of students is good. Care and support for them are strong.
- Leaders are tackling weaker areas effectively, including the curriculum, qualifications, attendance and target setting.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 31 part lessons taught by 34 teachers. Twelve of these observations were conducted jointly with four senior leaders. A meeting was held between senior leaders and inspectors to discuss the lessons observed.
- Inspectors also visited form time, registration and an assembly.
- Inspectors observed the focus on reading in English lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with the principal, head of academy, other leaders, teachers without leadership responsibilities, four members of the governing body, and a representative of the sponsor. The lead inspector met with an education consultant at the request of the principal.
- Inspectors spoke with five groups of students in meetings, as well as at other times, informally in lessons and around the academy.
- Inspectors took account of the 63 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) and a parental questionnaire that had been carried out by the academy.
- Inspectors reviewed 67 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspection team evaluated other information including: the academy's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses; the improvement plan; attendance and behaviour records; information about students' achievement and progress; minutes of governing body meetings; external reports and documents relating to the management and development of teachers' performance.

Inspection team

Nada Trikic, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Timothy McGuire

Additional Inspector

Richard White

Additional Inspector

Susan Tabberer

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Top Valley is a smaller-than-average secondary school. It became an academy in September 2012.
- Top Valley is sponsored by South Nottingham College Academy Trust.
- The proportion of students for whom the academy receives the pupil premium is well above average. This additional government funding is for students in the care of the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Most students are of White British heritage, although many other minority ethnic groups are represented.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is low.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- Currently, ten students attend off-site courses at Buxton Training, Equip, Premier Training and Wheelbase.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and consistence of teaching, and so improve achievement in all subjects by ensuring that teachers:
 - provide direct help to students whose reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills are weak
 - provide appropriate challenge and engaging lessons to strengthen students attitudes to learning
 - consider the prior knowledge, skills and understanding required for students to be successful with new work
 - provide opportunities for students to act on the feedback they are given
 - ask challenging questions to develop students' knowledge, understanding and communication skills
 - develop strategies to improve students' attitudes to learning in order to eliminate incidences of low level disruption
 - follow agreed behavioural policies consistently.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - making sure that improvement plans set out precisely what action are to be taken to improve achievement across the academy; and by identifying measureable milestones so that progress can be effectively checked
 - arranging internal moderation and external validation of assessment across all subjects to ensure accuracy
 - strengthening the Key Stage 3 curriculum, and the progression of reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills across the academy
 - strengthening the role of all leaders in driving improvement
 - ensuring that governors receive information to enable them to monitor the effectiveness of pupil premium funding on students' rates of progress

- identifying how new initiatives will be reviewed and evaluated to inform refinement or change.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action to the authority responsible for the academy.

An external review of governance, including a specific focus on the academy's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In 2013, achievement was inadequate because too many students did not make the progress they should in English and mathematics. The proportion of students to achieve five A* to C grades including English and mathematics was well below the national average. This represented a decline in performance compared to the predecessor school.
- The progress of the most-able pupils requires improvement. Until this year, the academy adopted an early-entry policy for GCSE in mathematics. Students did not make the progress they should in 2013. High ability students did not have the opportunity to attain the higher grades, and too few students made better-than-expected progress compared to national results.
- In 2013, students eligible for pupil premium funding achieved less well in English and mathematics than similar students nationally, and their peers. They achieved three-quarters of a grade below their peers in English and mathematics. Current tracking information shows that students supported by this funding are making better progress than before.
- The achievement of disabled students and those with special educational needs requires improvement because it is too variable. In 2013, the progress of identified students was better in mathematics than English. The learning needs of students are carefully identified to inform individual learning plans. Progress is accelerated in the targeted sessions tailored to improve skills and confidence. However, this is not routinely reinforced across other lessons.
- A lack of aspiration in students' academic targets contributed to weak performance in 2013. New progress targets have added challenge and ambition to the academy's work. Changes to the tracking and analysis of progress is now providing information to target students who are falling behind, and those capable of reaching top grades.
- Academy leaders recognise that a stronger emphasis on developing students reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills is required from entry. Staff training on reading, writing and the needs of students who enter the academy with lower levels of performance is supporting a new approach. A higher priority is set on reading for pleasure with regular opportunities for students to read in Years 7 to 9. Results from targeted intervention to improve low levels of reading are encouraging.
- Current performance shows an improving picture. Evidence from the academy's data, lesson observation and work in books indicates progress rates closer to national expectations in English and mathematics for current Year 11 students. Rates of progress in Years 7 and 8 are better than in previous years. This pattern is the same for students from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Arrangements for alternative provision are effective. Students, some of whom find traditional courses too challenging, access a variety of vocational programmes appropriate to their needs. Effective monitoring and transition plans help to prepare them for their next stage of education and training.
- Students supported by 'Year 7 catch-up' funding are beginning to make better progress in improving their literacy and numeracy. Targeted programmes and new resources including electronic readers have improved provision and progress.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- Teaching requires improvement because the quality is not consistently good in all subjects. Consequently, students do not make good progress over time, particularly in English and mathematics. Subjects, other than English, do not focus sufficiently on developing students' literacy skills.
- Students' engagement and interest in learning vary too much, depending on the subject and the teacher. Students are most enthusiastic when lessons are 'fun', 'active' and 'varied'. Students surveyed were less keen when lessons were 'too hard', 'predictable' or viewed as 'pointless'. In a few lessons, this results in incidences of low level disruption which slows the pace of learning.
- In lessons that require improvement, tasks and activities are not stretching enough for some and too hard for others. Not enough attention is given to students' prior knowledge, skills and understanding to support successful learning, and good progress. For example, the reading levels of students are not always considered when selecting resources. In these lessons, teachers do not check students' understanding regularly enough to provide support or additional challenge when it is needed.
- The use of questioning to maximise participation in lessons requires improvement. Given that students enter the academy with low levels of attainment, too few opportunities are planned for students to develop their communication and language skills.
- Detailed marking is becoming a consistent feature in students' work. This includes feedback on the quality of work linked to targets, and guidance on the next steps to take. This is most effective when the teacher provides a follow up task to enable the students to demonstrate their understanding. This aspect is less well developed.
- Where teaching is good, teachers already know what students understand and use this knowledge to plan demanding and interesting work, to which students respond enthusiastically. For example, in an English lesson students responded to the teacher's high expectations to learn new vocabulary, and then to apply their knowledge by analysing the language used in a video clip. As a result students displayed positive attitudes to learning.
- The academy has few teaching assistants. Where observed, teaching assistants supported the learning and progress of students identified with special educational needs well. On occasions, teachers are deployed to provide additional support in classes where students have specific learning needs. This helps students to understand the demands of examinations. They appreciate this personal support

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- The behaviour of students requires improvement because attitudes to learning and lessons are not consistently good. This is often linked to the variable quality of teaching and students' enjoyment of lessons. Students report that, in dull and boring lessons, some students mess about. Poor behaviour was observed in form time because teachers did not provide purposeful activities. Teachers are not equally effective in managing low level disruption.
- The behaviour policy has been revised to raise expectations. This is reflected in a slight rise in exclusions although figures remain below national rates. On-site provision for these students ensures that learning remains a priority. Most students have positive attitudes and enjoy good, harmonious relationships with teachers and each other. New students report that they feel

welcomed and settle well.

- The low levels of attendance in the predecessor school and the first year of academy status have been dealt with and attendance is now closer to the national average. The attendance of students eligible for pupil premium funding remains a challenge, particularly in Key Stage 4. Levels of persistent absence have reduced. The academy has been successful in improving the attendance of girls.
- Successful work with a partner organisation has led to improvements in behaviour, attendance and achievement. This programme supports identified groups including low attending girls and students eligible for pupil premium funding, to develop their skills and confidence. This is shown in their support for younger students with reading which makes them feel more positive about themselves.
- The academy monitors and supports students identified with specific needs very effectively. Well-rounded packages are provided for students and their families.
- Students are considerate of others as they move around the academy. The atmosphere is calm and orderly. A high priority is set on providing stimulating display in classrooms, and celebrating the many additional events and activities open to students.
- Students have a good awareness of different types of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying. Students are confident that academy staff will deal with incidents of this type. Incident logs kept by the academy indicate that incidences of bullying are rare and dealt with appropriately.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Through lessons and assemblies, students learn how to keep themselves safe, personally and online. Appropriate risks assessments are in place for off-site activities, including alternative provision. As a result, students say they feel safe and this is supported by the views of parents.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The academy is in transition. Decisions made in the predecessor school linked to target-setting, early access to examination courses and early entry led to significant underachievement in 2013. These factors continue to have a negative impact, but to a lesser extent for current students. Academy status has led to a new vision and ambition for the future which focuses strongly on students' progress from entry. This vision is not yet translated into good outcomes for students.
- Work to improve teaching quality is systematic, with regular training in response to findings from lesson observation. This is shown in improved marking and feedback. However, leaders' judgements on teaching quality do not take enough account of students' progress over time. Training and support is geared to career stage; newly qualified teachers and those involved in the 'Teach First' scheme appreciate the guidance they receive from academy staff and tutors from the University of Nottingham.
- The principal, head of academy, senior leaders and governors have an over-optimistic view of the academy's work and performance. There is clear awareness of the main priorities to support improvement. However, self-evaluation is not sufficiently robust linked to national expectations to support effective improvement planning. Whole-academy and subject plans do not include measureable milestones to check on progress.

- The introduction of new initiatives to tackle identified weaknesses is a positive feature of the academy's work. However, too little time is given to determine how initiatives will be reviewed and evaluated so that lessons can be learnt and plans refined.
- The principal, head of academy and governors have started to tackle the deep-seated issues revealed by the performance outcomes in 2013. Plans are well advanced to return to a three-year Key Stage 3 with a priority on accelerating progress in reading, writing, communications and numeracy. Changes to qualifications mean a shift from the over-reliance on equivalence qualifications.
- The system for monitoring the academy's work is led by the principal, head of academy and senior leaders. Delegation of responsibility to subject leaders to drive improvement is at an early stage. Training and opportunities for joint lesson observation are helping to build experience and the sharing of expertise across all levels of leadership.
- Procedures for performance management are led by the principal which ensures consistency. Other leaders are developing the necessary skills to contribute to the process. The introduction of challenging targets means that decisions on pay progression can be securely linked to students' progress and national expectations.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good in the wider curriculum through visits, activities and cultural exchanges. Sessions planned to motivate and inspire students using external partners are effective in supporting a positive ethos. This is evident in harmonious relationships and the favourable feedback from parents.
- The sponsor's representative is a member of the governing body and meets the principal regularly to monitor performance. Input has been valued to strengthen personnel management and support for the academy's re-building programme.
- The academy has been successful in establishing collaborative partnerships to support key developments in teaching and learning. This has been less effective with a 'challenge partner' whose role was to provide a robust quality review of the academy's performance. The report produced failed to provide a thorough evaluation of outcomes, or make links between achievement, teaching and leadership. This document was unhelpful to senior leaders and governors.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Reports to governors include an overview of achievement, particularly for older students. However, these are not sufficiently detailed, and they do not have enough data, for them to see how students and groups are progressing from different starting points, across the academy.
 - Governors are aware of the improving profile of teaching that has resulted from training and recruitment.
 - Governors are well aware of their responsibilities for linking pay with performance. They recognise that they have not done enough to challenge leaders about evidence of students' progress when considering pay decisions.
 - Governors have not had sufficient discussion about the use of pupil premium funding. They do not have enough understanding of the effectiveness of different strategies used, or the extent to which gaps are closing in the academy and with national standards and expectations for all cohorts.
 - Governors' knowledge and understanding of the academy have increased since the change of status through more regular discussions with senior leaders. The new meeting pattern enables

governors to review progress reports effectively.

- Governors have been energised by the change to academy status and rightly have confidence in the academy's leadership to accelerate the achievement of all students.

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	138573
Local authority	Nottingham
Inspection number	440064

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	610
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Mansfield
Principal	Peter Brown
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0115 9539060
Fax number	0115 9539060
Email address	admin@topvalleyacademy.org

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2014

