

Abbeyfield School

Mereway, Northampton, NN4 8BU

Inspection dates 2–3 July 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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Not enough students make the progress expected of them in science and mathematics.
- Teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure students make enough progress across all subjects, and particularly in science.
- Not all teachers have high enough expectations of what their students can achieve, particularly the most-able students.
- Teachers' marking does not always help students to do better. Students do not regularly respond to the advice given to them.
- The sixth form requires improvement because achievement varies too much between subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- This is an improving school. Senior leaders and other members of staff are successfully tackling many areas that need development, including teaching and achievement in several subjects.
- Students' behaviour is good. They are polite, friendly and take pride in their appearance. Positive relationships between members of staff and students create an atmosphere which contributes to good learning. Students are safe.
- The Principal is an asset of the academy. She has a vision and passion to improve the life chances of her students and she is well supported in this by the academy's staff, its governors and the sponsor. The Principal knows what to do to make this a good school, and she is on her way to doing so.
- Teaching in the sixth form is now good. The 16-19 study programme is fully in place.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students learning in 42 lessons taught by 41 different teachers, including 11 joint observations with senior leaders. Inspectors also visited two tutor periods and a Year 9 assembly.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior and middle leaders, three members of the governing body, and a representative of the academy sponsor.
- Inspectors spoke with students in meetings as well as informally in lessons.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including the academy’s evaluation of its own performance, data on students’ attainment and progress, attendance and behaviour records, safeguarding procedures, policies on teaching and learning, and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide selection of work in students’ books.
- Inspectors took account of the 46 responses to the Parent View questionnaire and the 40 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Ian McNeilly, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
James Fuller	Additional Inspector
Catherine Powell	Additional Inspector
Lynn Williams	Additional Inspector
Shan Oswald	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy opened on 1st October 2012. It is sponsored by an educational trust, Creative Education Academies.
- The academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school for students aged 11-18.
- The proportion of students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding is broadly average. This additional government funding is for students in care of the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and children from service families.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average; the proportion of students supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- A very small number of students attend courses offered by alternative providers of education, all based in Northamptonshire: Hospital and Outreach Education, The Rushmere Academy, The CE Academy – Overleys Campus, and Moulton College.
- The academy collaborates at sixth form level with Northampton School for Boys and Northampton School for Girls.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by:
 - ensuring that students respond to the feedback they are given, including on the presentation of work, so that this helps accelerate the progress they make
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve, particularly the most-able students.
- Improve achievement by:
 - increasing the rate of progress made by students in science
 - building on the recent increased rates of progress in mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement requires significant improvement in science in Key Stages 3 and 4. Evidence gathered during the inspection, including observations of teaching and scrutiny of students' work, confirmed the academy's judgement that achievement in this subject area is too low. Academy data show that rates of progress have increased for Year 10 and 11 students in the individual science subjects (biology, chemistry and physics) through better teaching. However, a high turnover of staff means that the data provided for core and additional science are unreliable. Students are not making enough progress in these subjects in Key Stage 4, and in science generally in Key Stage 3.
- Achievement in mathematics improved in 2013 and academy data show that rates of progress have increased further in this subject. However, the proportions of students making and exceeding the progress expected of them in Year 11 are still below average and this requires action to bring about further improvement. Progress is currently good in mathematics in Key Stage 3.
- Achievement in geography and history in 2013 was too low. However, there have been improvements in these subject areas in 2014, though both require further development.
- More-able students did not make the progress expected of them in 2013. This was even the case in English, where other students perform very well. The academy's data show an improved current picture, particularly in mathematics, where half of the more-able students are exceeding the progress expected of them.
- The proportion of Year 11 students making good progress has increased in almost every subject, though improvement is still required in chemistry, graphics and hospitality.
- Achievement is good in English across the whole academy, though less so in English literature at Key Stage 4. The proportion of students making the progress expected of them in English language is above the national average.
- Students make very good progress in languages. They achieve well in the popular choice of French, and the small number of students who take Spanish, Polish, Russian and Italian also make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Art, physical education and drama are subjects in which students performed well at GCSE level in 2013; academy data show that good progress is set to continue in these areas.
- In 2013, the average standards in examinations and the progress made by students supported by the pupil premium were lower than for other students in the academy. This group of students was almost one GCSE grade behind their peers in English and more than one GCSE grade behind their peers in mathematics. The academy's data show that these gaps are closing considerably, and that the progress and performance of younger students in the academy who benefit from pupil premium funding are improving.
- The proportion of students supported through school action plus making expected progress in mathematics is broadly in line with national averages. These same students make much better progress in English. Disabled students and those who have special needs supported through school action are progressing well in English but not in mathematics, and this also applies to those students with a statement of special educational needs.

- The academy uses alternative educational provision off the school site for a small number of students who are at risk of not participating fully in their usual classes. These students are well supported, remain in education and, as a result, achieve success.
- Early entry to mathematics GCSE has been used well by the academy this academic year. 11 more-able students were entered early; all achieved an A* or A grade and all proceeded to study further mathematics. Of the 32 students entered early at foundation level, half achieved a C grade.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to improve students' reading standards. Key Stage 3 students who require reading support benefit from one-to-one reading sessions with members of staff and/or students from Years 10 and 11. Students also read with teaching assistants in small groups. These strategies, along with regular, timetabled library lessons are increasing students' reading ages.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. In 2013, these students underachieved overall in academic subjects, though progress was good in vocational qualifications. However, rates of progress this year have increased, particularly at AS level. Achievement is good in several subject areas, but requires improvement in others, specifically biology, chemistry and graphics.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There has not been enough good teaching over time to ensure that students learn well and make good or better progress across subject areas. Teaching has improved and continues to do so. However, students' work and the teaching observed during the inspection show that this area still requires improvement.
- The quality of marking varies too much. Even when marking is done well, students are not routinely directed to respond to the feedback given to them. Therefore, students do not make the necessary changes in their work and the same comments appear several times in students' books. Some teachers spend a long time marking books but the impact is very limited as they are not taking the extra step of ensuring that students act on it. The marking of literacy, while good in English, is not consistently good in all subjects. Students appreciated most the feedback they received in English, French and mathematics.
- Teachers do not consistently insist that work is presented well. As a result, many students habitually submit work which is below their capabilities. However, work was presented beautifully in graphic design and art.
- Although teachers plan their lessons well, more-able students are not always challenged to the full extent of their capabilities. Over time, this has resulted in some of the academy's brightest students lacking confidence, or setting themselves lower targets than those that are readily achievable. In a science lesson, an able student set himself a target of a 'C' but then breezed through an A grade question.
- Teachers regularly question students, usually in an attempt to confirm how well they understand the work. However, less challenging questions are used too often. These do not give teachers the opportunity to respond quickly to students' misunderstandings, or to provide alternative tasks to accelerate their progress. When questioning was challenging, students were sometimes not given enough thinking time in which to respond in depth.

- There is good teaching in the school, and some that is outstanding. This is even the case in science, where most improvement is needed.
- Relationships between members of staff and students are very good. This helps to create an atmosphere in lessons which has a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning and on the progress they make. This was particularly evident in drama where a bond of trust had developed, allowing the students the confidence to take risks in their performances. Teaching and learning observed in this subject were outstanding.
- In some subjects, target sheets are stuck in books. These complement the feedback students are given. Where these were used well, students could clearly explain the purpose of them, and show that they had made progress as a result.
- Some teachers of French combined humour with relentless pace to great effect. One student said, 'My target is a B. But she (the teacher) won't let me out of the door until I get an A.' These teachers are very popular with the students, and it was easy to see why. One student said, 'It's my weakest subject, but the one I like the most.'
- Teaching in the sixth form is good, and some is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations, with one student saying 'Teachers are very quick to act if there is any slacking'. Students are responsive to questions, engaged in their tasks, enjoy their lessons. Teaching has improved in the sixth form and achievement is catching up. Students appreciate the support they receive with one saying, 'I wouldn't change anything.'

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. This is a strength of the academy. Very little low-level disruption was observed in lessons, even when the teaching was not as interesting as it should have been. These positive attitudes to learning have a good impact on progress.
- Students are courteous, friendly to members of staff and to visitors, and take a pride in their appearance. Almost everyone who responded to both the staff and parent questionnaires felt that behaviour in the academy was good.
- Members of staff have successfully improved attendance. It is now broadly in line with national averages. The attendance of those pupils who are supported by pupil premium funding has improved more quickly than that of their peers.
- The academy has developed considerable support systems to improve students' behaviour. Permanent exclusions are reducing, though the proportion is still above the national average. Fixed-term exclusions are reducing and are well below the national average. However, this is not solely because behaviour is improving in the academy. Another reason is the use of an 'Internal Exclusions Unit' as a sanction. This means that members of staff can help ensure students continue working instead of allowing them not to attend school. The academy is working hard to improve the behaviour of a small minority of repeat offenders.
- The academy has begun a system of 'restorative justice' to try and reduce instances of poor behaviour and to encourage students to make better choices in the future. This has had a positive impact on behaviour and students' self-esteem.
- Members of staff are very visible during break times. Although there is some boisterousness and physical horseplay at times, behaviour is managed well.

- Students have a good awareness of bullying. They report few instances of bullying and they feel that the academy deals well with any incidents that do arise.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good. Students see themselves as role models for younger students and act accordingly. They are actively involved in academy life and are very keen to establish a sense of community.
- The academy's work to keep students safe is good. Governors requested a safeguarding audit in May which confirmed this. Members of staff are vigilant about keeping students safe, and they receive training to help them do so. Positive attitudes towards health and safety were observed in a science lesson.
- Vulnerable students are well supported through the 'Success Centre', and those who attend feel safe and valued.

The leadership and management are good

- The Principal, senior leaders, governors and representatives of the academy's sponsor are all having a positive impact. While achievement and teaching are not yet good overall, both areas have improved since the academy opened.
- Leaders, including middle leaders, share a vision to improve the life chances of the students in their care. Their hard work has resulted in students making better progress, though all concerned know there is still much work to do, especially around raising students' aspirations.
- The academy's self-evaluation is accurate and detailed. Leaders know which areas require improvement and they have plans in place to address them.
- Senior leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching are sound and they know what individual teachers need to do to ensure they become good or outstanding. A programme of professional development training effectively supports teachers' development.
- Leaders have successfully improved the progress and the attendance of those students who are eligible for pupil premium funding.
- Middle leaders are fully involved in the evaluation of teaching and achievement, and they also take responsibility, when necessary, to communicate with parents. They share the senior leaders' vision to improve the academy and they feel very positive for the future. Middle leaders are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching.
- The philosophy of the academy sponsor is to promote a design curriculum. Students are introduced to a series of concepts, for example, 'pattern', and these are then taught across different subjects in an attempt to develop skills that are transferrable. This began with Year 7 students in 2012 and several spoke positively about it.
- The academy's curriculum is becoming more academic in terms of the qualifications offered. This supports leaders' vision to raise students' aspirations. The Principal accurately identified that some underachievement was being masked by taking vocational qualifications, and these are reducing in number.
- Leadership in the sixth form is good. The post-16 study programme is fully in place.

Independent advice and guidance is effective, both on entry to the sixth form and in terms of future planning.

- Leaders' attempts to raise aspirations are also seen through the variety of activities available to students. A 'musician in residence' has recently been appointed; this is already beginning to raise the profile of the arts, particularly through lunchtime performances. There is a wide range of clubs. Sport is promoted particularly well through these. The street dance club is popular, especially with boys, two of whom have competed internationally in this. A programme of minority sports, such as kayaking and fencing, has recently begun. Relationships with universities are being extended.
- In Key Stage 3, opportunities to develop moral and spiritual understanding come through the curriculum areas of 'ethics' and 'key life skills', both of which incorporate areas of religious education. Beyond Year 9, these areas are considered through assemblies and extra-curricular activities, such as raising funds for charities. All students commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day.
- Strategies to engage parents have had a positive impact on attendance at academy events, for example, at the recent options evening where almost every student in Year 9 was represented. Attendance at parents' evenings has increased, though only half of parents attend these overall.
- Arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance of the academy is good. Governors offer an appropriate mix of support and challenge to senior leaders, and they are fully aware of the academy's areas for development. Minutes from meetings, as well as an interview with representatives of the governing body, indicate that challenging and appropriate questions have been put to senior leaders about priorities such as improving achievement in science. The governing body considers reports about the quality of teaching and challenge academy leaders as to how they intend to support members of staff in making necessary improvements. Members of the governing body have a positive relationship with the academy sponsor; governors feel the trust listens to them and offers support if necessary. The academy sponsor appointed a business manager who has improved the quality of financial information. As a result, governors' understanding of academy finances is good, including the allocation of pupil premium funding. Members of the governing body are fully involved in decisions about teachers' pay increases and ensure they are awarded only where their performance is good or better. Governors conduct an annual skills audit to ensure members are most effective; a safeguarding audit in May found that their practice in this area was secure.

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	138858
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	440032

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	1228
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	135
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Walls
Principal	Claire Morrell
Telephone number	01604 763616
Fax number	01604 765036
Email address	head@abbeyfieldschool.org.uk

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