

Colchester Academy

Hawthorn Avenue, Colchester, CO4 3JL

Inspection dates 1–2 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
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 has serious weaknesses.

- Achievement is inadequate, particularly in English. Since the last inspection, standards have declined. Standards of attainment and the progress students make are both well below national averages.
- GCSE English results have remained well below average for the last three years and the academy does not expect them to rise in 2014.
- Attainment is low in science and humanities.
- The most able students are underperforming. Students who join the academy with higher-than-average attainment make weak progress.
- Low levels of literacy have not been tackled effectively through coherent action across different subjects.
- Students' attitudes to learning are not good enough to accelerate their progress.
- Although ambitious for the school, the academy leaders and governors believe that the academy is doing better than it is because they have not been comparing its performance rigorously against the most relevant information.
- Subject leaders are new, and although they are doing the right things it is too early for their work to have secured the improvements necessary in the quality of teaching and achievement.
- Teaching is improving in subjects where achievement is inadequate because of the determined leadership of senior leaders and governors, but this has not had time to have sufficient impact on achievement in these subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- This is an improving school as leaders are addressing the difficulties which led to a decline in standards; as a result teaching is strengthening.
- Academy leaders have successfully improved behaviour and attendance, which is currently in line with national averages.
- Students and staff are proud of their new academy buildings which provide an enhanced environment for learning.
- Achievement in mathematics is improving as a result of good teaching.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 41 lessons. Eight of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Tutorial sessions and an assembly were also observed.
- Inspectors observed students' behaviour at breaks, lunchtimes and before school.
- Inspectors reviewed documents, including those relating to students' attainment and progress, the academy's development plan and evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, minutes of meetings of the governing body, records concerning behaviour and safeguarding documents.
- Meetings were held with staff, groups of students, a representative of the local authority and members of the governing body.
- The views of 61 members of staff who completed the Ofsted staff questionnaire were analysed and taken into account. There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey to provide data for this year, but inspectors took account of the total responses from the last two years.

Inspection team

Paul Lawrence, Lead inspector

Seconded Inspector

Angela Podmore

Additional Inspector

Heather Housden

Additional Inspector

Martin Wyard

Additional Inspector

Paul Lawrence is appointed as an Additional Inspector, under the powers relating to additional inspectors, in paragraph 11 of Part 2 of Schedule 12 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006'

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

Information about this school

- Colchester Academy opened in September 2010 in the existing buildings of its predecessor school and moved into new, purpose-built academy buildings in February 2014. The academy is sponsored by Colchester Institute and the University of Essex.
- Colchester Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. However, it has a large number of surplus places as the new building is designed to accommodate 1200 students.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is higher than the national average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also higher than the national average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is much higher than the national average. Pupil premium funding is additional funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school uses alternative provision to educate a proportion of its students at Catten College, Colchester Institute, North East Essex Additional Provision School and Children's Support Services Centre, Copford.
- The school meets the current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching across the school by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving and increasing the level of challenge in lessons, especially for the most able
 - improving students' attitudes to their learning
 - ensuring that students understand the targets that are set for them and how well they are progressing towards meeting them.
- Strengthen students' achievement, particularly in English, science and humanities by:
 - improving students' writing skills
 - ensuring a consistent and coherent approach to developing students' literacy skills
 - improving teachers' expertise in accurately assessing the standard of students' work.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - strengthening whole-school self-evaluation so the school assesses its own progress against relevant benchmarks
 - ensuring that new middle leaders can learn from already effective leaders in the academy
 - ensuring that governors have a better understanding of school achievement.

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

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is inadequate

- Students join the academy in Year 7 with standards that are below those expected of their age. They make less progress than they should and leave with standards which are well below average in subjects such as English, science and the humanities.
- The proportion of students who achieve five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been too variable and has declined since 2012.
- Standards in English are not high enough. In each of the last three years, students have achieved, on average, half a GCSE grade lower than students nationally, having made considerably less progress than they should. The academy's own predictions suggest that this pattern will be repeated in the 2014 GCSE results.
- Teachers' assessment of the standard of students' work in English is not accurate. The work done by students in English this year shows that the progress made by students in Years 7 to 10 has not been as much as teachers believe.
- The most able students do not make enough progress. Students who join the academy with attainment which is above average make much less progress than similar students nationally and much less progress than students who join the academy with average or below average attainment.
- Achievement in mathematics is improving year on year and attainment is close to the national average. This is because the quality of teaching in mathematics is good and improving. Achievement in modern foreign languages is also improving rapidly.
- Most Year 11 students were entered early for mathematics in 2013. This supported the achievement of the majority of students because it helped motivate them to improve upon their previous grade.
- The gap is narrowing between the attainment of students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding and that of other students at the academy. In 2013 students who were eligible for support through the pupil premium achieved GCSE grades in line with other students in the academy in mathematics. However, the gap in attainment is still too wide in English as pupil premium funded students achieved, on average, almost two thirds of a GCSE grade lower than other students.
- Students with special educational needs have not achieved as well as they should.
- Additional government funding to support the learning of students whose English or mathematics is below expected standards when they start Year 7 is being used well to provide extra support. These students are now reading proficiently and with understanding. However, older students are not sustaining similar progress in their literacy or numeracy, and the proportion of students whose reading age is too low remains high throughout the academy.
- The academy realises that it sends too many students to pursue their learning at alternative providers and it is working to reduce this number because it is not having a positive impact upon the achievement of the students.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across different subjects. While the overall quality of teaching is improving, including in English, the humanities and the sciences, it has not yet demonstrated enough impact on achievement.
- Teachers have typically aimed their lessons at middle-ability students and have not done enough to demonstrate to the most able students the standards they should be aiming for.
- Teachers provide students with few opportunities to undertake extended writing. Students do undertake a variety of tasks, but these are typically composed of short-answer questions and worksheets which do not encourage students to plan, structure and compose longer responses.
- English teachers have not planned sequences of lessons which coherently develop students' skills in writing. Assessment of the standard of students' work has been unreliable and not effectively moderated across the department. Departmental planning in English has now started to improve teachers' practice.
- Teachers have recently started to apply the academy policy outlining a common approach to how they should respond to errors and misconceptions in spelling and grammar. As a result students' achievement in literacy is only beginning to be supported across the academy.
- Teachers' use of information, including in English, about the learning needs of individual students has improved greatly.
- Teachers' marking is improving. Written feedback is becoming more regular and thorough, and contains an increasing amount of subject specific advice about what students need to do to improve. Although targets are set, students are not always clear what these are and how much progress they are making towards meeting them.
- The teaching of mathematics is frequently strong. The best learning is carefully planned and engages students by placing mathematics in real-life contexts. Teachers use skilful questioning to gauge the understanding of individual students effectively and, when necessary, teachers have the expertise and confidence to change the focus of the lesson.
- There is high-quality teaching in a few other subjects. Teaching in modern foreign languages is strong, and students make good progress because they respond positively to teachers' commitment to teaching through the target language. In art students develop a love of their subject and produce high-quality, imaginative work because teachers inspire them to have confidence in their own creativity.
- Senior leaders are clear about where the strongest teaching is in the academy. Staff training has been established to help teachers learn from this best practice and this is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching overall.
- Teachers in charge of subjects, many of whom are new to the academy, are developing effective plans for improving teaching in their subject areas.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. This is because they have not yet developed positive enough attitudes to their learning. While students are compliant, they do not routinely take the opportunity to work as hard or fast as they could in lessons.
- Some students can be reluctant to respond to teachers' questioning in lessons and appear lethargic and difficult to motivate in practical lessons such as physical education and design and technology.
- The tutor period at the start of each afternoon is not used effectively as an opportunity to shape students' attitudes to learning.
- There is currently very little display of students' work around the academy. Students say that they would find it motivating and inspiring to see examples of the best students' work more prominently displayed and celebrated.
- Both staff and students overwhelmingly express the opinion that there has been a noticeable improvement in the conduct of students around the academy. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced substantially, as have the number of incidents of bullying and poor behaviour.
- The recent move to the new purpose-built academy building has contributed greatly to this improvement. Students take obvious pride in their surroundings and look after the site well. Their movement around the building is calm and orderly, and they are almost always polite and courteous.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students believe that they are safe and well cared for and are confident about raising any concerns with teachers and other adults. Incidents of bullying, which are reducing, are tackled effectively by the academy when they do occur. Recent training for staff and students has addressed issues of homophobia and racial intolerance, and this has had a positive impact across the academy. Students are well aware of the potential risks associated with modern technologies.
- The academy closely plans how students will be educated about their position as citizens within a diverse society, through tutor periods, religious education lessons and theme-based days. There are many constructive links with local organisations to support this work but has not developed international links as well. This limits students' understanding of global diversity.
- The academy has made improving attendance a particular priority. There has been improvement in attendance each year over the last three years and levels of absence have fallen in line with national averages.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Until recently academy leaders had not successfully tackled poor progress in English or underachievement by the most able students.
- In its self-evaluation, the academy too often judges its success by comparing itself to the performance of its predecessor school rather than establishing challenging and appropriate benchmarks based upon relevant national attainment data and value-added measures.
- Leaders appreciate the importance of monitoring the quality of teaching in the academy and

have concentrated upon developing systems that take account of all the evidence available about the impact of teaching over time. This monitoring is becoming more accurate, but still reports an over-optimistic view of the quality of teaching as it does not take enough account of the progress students make.

- Since the 2013 examination results, academy leaders have acted decisively to bring about improvement. During this academic year there have been significant changes in middle leadership and a large number of teachers have left and been replaced. This has strengthened teaching and leadership, but there has not been enough time for these changes to have the necessary impact on the decline in standards.
- The new subject and pastoral leadership team, although inexperienced, are dedicated and capable. They are putting in place sensible systems to check the progress students are making and the quality of teaching.
- The academy has instigated a comprehensive programme of professional development for teachers which has centred on important areas of teaching and learning. A recent focus on improving marking has had a clear impact on practice across the academy.
- Appropriate arrangements are in place to review the performance of teachers. This rewards those who the academy's data shows have performed effectively and supports others to improve.
- Academy leaders have had to manage the transition from the old to the new academy site this year. This has necessarily demanded a large amount of time and energy. Now this move is complete, the modern academy building represents a significant enhancement of the capacity of the college to deliver effective education.
- The Principal consistently and forthrightly articulates high levels of aspiration for the achievement of the students in the disadvantaged community the academy serves. He has previously identified reducing absence and improving behaviour as crucial building blocks in securing sustainable improvements in achievement in the long term. The academy has seen huge improvements in both of these areas.
- As the academy has a very large number of spare places, it accepts a much higher than usual number of students who have been moved from other schools. This presents additional challenges to the leadership and management of the academy.
- Academy leaders have the overwhelming confidence of the staff as a whole. A very large majority of responses to the staff questionnaire feel that the leadership and management of the academy are good.
- The academy provides a broad and balanced range of learning opportunities. It has consciously moved from a vocational to a more academic curriculum in an attempt to provide students with courses which provide appropriate pathways to higher-level qualifications.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is highly ambitious for the academy and feels passionately about enhancing its position within the local community. A large number of governors, including the Chair and vice chair, represent the lead sponsor, Colchester Institute, and so bring a large amount of experience in education to the governing body.

- Governors have increased the level of challenge that is provided to the senior leaders and now ensure this is well documented in written minutes. They have been fully involved in establishing and monitoring targets for the performance of the academy, but they have focused too much on headline attainment figures and have not considered the implications of important data about the progress students make.
- Governors have been rigorous in monitoring the performance of certain student groups, such as those for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding and those who have special educational needs. However, they have not been sufficiently aware of the relative performance of different ability groups such as the most able.

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	136195
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	442082

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	696
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alison Andreas
Principal	Barry Hersom
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2012
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