

Iceni Academy

Stoke Road, Methwold, Thetford, IP26 4PE

Inspection dates 24–25 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good 2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Early years provision		Good 2
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Attainment and progress rates are improving but they have been below average in the secondary years and are not consistently good across all years.
- Although improving, the quality of teaching is not always good or better, particularly in the secondary years and sixth form. Teachers do not always have high enough expectations, especially of the most able.
- Best practice in classroom skills is inconsistently shared across subjects, particularly in the use of assessment.
- Students do not always respond to the helpful guidance given in marking about how to improve their work.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students do not make good progress. The range of subjects on offer and tracking of achievement are still underdeveloped.
- The Principal is working to raise achievement and improve teaching, but systems for monitoring and assessing students' achievement are not applied consistently well.
- Leaders and managers have not worked well as a team. They recognise that teaching and students' achievement are not yet good across all years.
- Subject leaders' roles in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching are underdeveloped.

The school has the following strengths

- The quality of teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and the children achieve well.
- Students in all years are well behaved and have positive attitudes to learning.
- Students feel safe. Their parents and carers agree that they are safe.
- The large number of clubs and activities enrich students' learning.
- Progress and attainment are good in the primary years.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted so they gain a good understanding of life in modern British society.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors collected evidence on teaching and learning by observing lessons on both sites. They looked at students’ work and talked to them about it to assess their understanding and attitudes to learning.
- Inspectors carried out a scrutiny of students’ work jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Six joint observations were carried out with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also observed a range of activities carried out by the academy to support individuals and small groups of students.
- The inspectors held meetings with the Principal, members of the governing body, representatives of the trust which sponsors the academy, staff and five groups of students.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, inspectors took account of the 72 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and responses to an inspection questionnaire from 40 staff.
- The inspectors looked at the academy’s development plan, its self-evaluation, data on attainment and progress, records of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, a wide range of policies and procedures and the arrangements for the safeguarding of students.
- Inspectors attended form periods with personalised-learning tutors.
- Inspectors listened to students reading.

Inspection team

Michael Sutherland-Harper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
John Greevy	Additional Inspector
Brenda Watson	Additional Inspector
Russell Ayling	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Hockwold Primary School and Methwold High School formally amalgamated in September 2011 and became an academy as an all-through school in January 2013. The academy is based on two separate sites which are six miles apart.
- The academy is sponsored by the Academy Transformation Trust.
- The sixth form is small and most students enter from Key Stage 4 at the academy. A new Vice Principal, with responsibility for the sixth form, was appointed in September 2014.
- Both the primary and the secondary phases are smaller than average-sized schools of these types.
- The academy serves the largest rural catchment in Norfolk.
- The very large majority of students are of White British heritage.
- A small number of American pupils from service families begin their early years or primary education at the academy before continuing at schools that follow the American curriculum on base sites.
- A small number of sixth form students are educated away from the academy in the 'Futsal' scheme run by Norwich Football Club.
- The proportion of pupils supported through a statement of special educational needs or the new education, health and care plan is above average.
- The proportion of students for whom the academy receives the pupil premium is below the national average. This is additional government funding for disadvantaged students, who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are in care.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress at Year 6 and Year 11. National minimum standards were met in the sixth form.
- Primary classes are taught in mixed-age year groups.
- The Principal has been in post since September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning so more is at least good and students' attainment and progress improve by:
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of what all students can achieve, , especially the most able, and encourage them to do better
 - checking that students respond effectively to the helpful guidance given in marking so they do not repeat mistakes
 - making sure that students are fully engaged by the activities on offer so that their positive attitudes to learning further assist their progress
 - sharing good classroom practice, including in the use of assessment, across subjects.
- Develop the quality of sixth form provision by:
 - amending the range of subjects on offer so that it meets the needs of all students and increases staying-on rates at age 16
 - monitoring closely the success of the links with external providers of learning
 - making better use of tracking data to ensure that attainment and progress rates rise more rapidly.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management and improve teaching and achievement by:
 - making sure that systems for assessing and monitoring students' progress and attainment are fully implemented across the academy
 - ensuring that subject leaders play a more active role in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching so that its quality improves, especially in the secondary years and sixth form.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because they have not ensured that achievement and teaching are consistently good across the academy. There are weaknesses in teaching and achievement in the secondary years and in the sixth form, which requires improvement. However, achievement and teaching are good in the early years provision and primary phase and improving elsewhere
- The roles of subject leaders in the monitoring and evaluating of teaching is underdeveloped and is not always having the impact necessary to improve teaching quality. The academy is working steadily to develop systems for assessing and monitoring students' achievement to drive improvement more quickly forward, but this work is at an early stage.
- The Principal gives clear direction to the academy. She has raised expectations for teachers and students through her action plans so that teaching and achievement are steadily and more rapidly improving in the secondary years. She has been supported by senior leaders, staff and governors, who are working more successfully with her as a team. However, the academy's detailed self-evaluation is overgenerous because leaders do not take enough account of the impact on achievement when judging teaching.
- Improving attainment of the most able students has been a key priority for the academy. However, responsibility for this has been delegated to classroom teachers, and teaching is not always sufficiently challenging to enable these students to make more rapid progress.
- The curriculum has been reviewed to more closely meet students' learning needs and interests. Subjects available at Key Stage 4 prepare students for the sixth form where the academy is working actively with the sponsor trust to widen the range of subjects on offer. Enrichment of students' learning is a growing strength. The large number of additional clubs and activities attract many participants. The academy is using existing National Curriculum levels as it works with staff and the academy trust to implement new curriculum and assessment strategies.
- The narrowing gap in the progress and attainment of disadvantaged students, when compared with their classmates, is evidence that pupil premium funding is appropriately targeted.
- The academy provides a high level of support for disadvantaged students, which includes the use of outside agencies where appropriate, one-to-one and small-group work. Increases in attendance and better rates of progress and attitudes to learning have improved results in English and mathematics.
- Primary sports funding is used appropriately to increase the range of activities and opportunities available. As a result, participation rates have increased, with the large majority of participants now involved in one or more clubs to benefit their physical health and well-being. The pupils, themselves, have been actively involved in discussions about the use of funds.
- Procedures for managing teachers' performance are rigorous, with targets linked to the academy focus on improved achievement and teaching, as well as the national *Teachers' Standards*. Promotion up the pay scales is not automatic. Staff are held accountable for the attainment and progress of groups they teach. Staff have a suitable range of training opportunities, which are currently under review, to ensure they meet professional needs.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted and monitored well, especially in the personal support they receive. The academy has recently examined its provision to ensure that support for the individual remains a strength in this tolerant and united community which actively promotes equal opportunities.
- Safeguarding practices and procedures meet all current requirements.
- Leaders assiduously evaluate the quality of education experienced by sixth form students educated off-site

by checking their progress and attendance.

- The academy benefits from close links with key staff at the sponsoring academy trust. Trust members visit the academy regularly to check on examination performance, the quality of teaching and the progress of students. They provide support and guidance to senior leaders to ensure continued improvement, as well as holding the academy to account for its performance. Growing links with other schools in the trust and institutions of higher education provide suitable careers guidance from Year 8 to 13.
- The improvements that have already taken place resulting in strengths in the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary provision, students' good behaviour and more supportive parents show the academy has the capacity for further improvement.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have a clear understanding of the academy's strengths and areas for development. They work closely with the Principal and staff from the trust to ensure that teaching and achievement are on an upward curve and improving more quickly than previously. They have a good understanding of data on students' progress and attainment and have challenged the academy about the accuracy of its predictions for achievement. Governors know the academy and its community because they make regular visits. They ensure that the management of staff performance is rigorous and is used to reward good teaching. They check that the pupil premium is used in a targeted way and review the impact of the spending by closely analysing students' achievement. Governors are trained in safeguarding and safer recruitment.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. This is the case around the academy and in lessons in all year groups. Relationships in lessons between students and teachers are usually good. Students are polite, helpful and courteous to visitors and treat others with respect. They take pride in their uniform and appearance and do not want to let the academy down. Older students help younger ones, for example, by supporting their reading. The large majority of parents and carers say that students are well behaved.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning. They say that the academy is improving and has given them more impetus to do well in their studies, for example, through raised aspirations. In the few lessons where teaching is less engaging, students very occasionally lose concentration and start to daydream.
- Students say that bullying is rare. They know the different forms that it may take, such as name calling and cyber bullying, through presentations in assemblies. Any incidents are dealt with quickly by staff. Students also feel well supported by friendship groups because students look out for each other.
- Students are aware of the risks they may encounter in everyday life, such as those associated with using the internet or mobile phones, and understand what constitutes extremism. For example, in form time with personalised learning tutors, students explored world news so they had a clearer understanding of the importance of living in a tolerant, supportive society. No racist incidents have been recorded.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students feel safe. Parents and carers say that their children are safe. Leaders ensure that all staff have had child protection training, which is frequently reviewed. Both sites are safe and secure. All incidents are carefully logged and followed up. Close checks are made on visitors to the academy. The safety of students educated off-site is regularly checked.
- Although below national figures, attendance is improving quickly. Monitoring of attendance is robust and systematic, for example, through contacting parents on the first day of absence and fortnightly reviews. Persistent absence rates have also fallen. Very few students are late to school or lessons.
- Fixed term exclusions have fallen and are below national figures, as the academy has made its expectations of behaviour clear. There was one permanent exclusion last year.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across the academy is rising but is not yet consistently good. It is almost always good in the early years provision and the primary years, but less so in the secondary years and sixth form.
- Teaching requires improvement because teachers are not always ambitious enough. The targets set do not always stretch students appropriately and ensure that all groups, including the most able, make rapid progress. Students are not sufficiently engaged when tasks lack challenge, and their rate of progress slows.
- Teachers have a number of opportunities to share their best classroom skills with colleagues. However, the sharing of good practice, including in the use of assessment in guiding teachers how to make work challenging for all students, is not effective enough across subjects.
- Teachers' marking often provides clear guidance about the next steps towards improvement and ensures that students' work is well presented. However, teachers do not always make sure that students follow up on the guidance given to ensure that errors are not repeated in future.
- Where learning is strongest, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the primary years, teachers make clear links to previous learning and the range of activities engages and motivates students. Teachers focus well on the needs of the most able, disadvantaged or disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Teachers question students well to check their understanding and guide support staff to help students when they need extra support.
- Resources are often used well. For example, in a Year 1 and 2 lesson on use of nouns and adjectives, the teacher used video clips from the author of the story to emphasise its humour and engage all. At the same time, support staff were closely involved in guiding pupils about how to improve their work with effective use of the class 'learning walls'.
- The academy checks on the quality of provision for students educated off-site to ensure that they make expected rates of progress and attend regularly. It is currently developing the range of programmes on offer.
- The academy has focused on improving the teaching of literacy, numeracy and communication skills. As part of this programme, older students and support staff work closely with younger readers to ensure that their reading skills are improving and now reach a higher standard.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement in the secondary phase, including the sixth form. It is good in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the primary years.
- Students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics require improvement in the secondary years, but are moving forward. The proportion attaining at least five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics rose slightly in 2014 from 2013 figures when it was below average. Academy data and inspectors' observations indicate that standards are rising at a much faster rate. Mathematics standards have been higher than in English, but a focus on literacy and language skills has improved results in English. Currently, the present Year 11 are progressing faster than previous year groups in both subjects.
- Most-able students are given additional challenging activities in some classes, but the challenge and targets are not always demanding enough to ensure that they progress quickly to the higher levels, especially in the secondary years. The number of top grades is rising slowly at GCSE, but attainment of the most able is rising faster in the primary years. The academy is changing its approach to the learning of the most able to ensure that targets are more challenging and students have higher aspirations.

- Students make expected, and sometimes better, progress with the development of reading skills. Year 7 catch-up funding is used to provide additional work on reading skills, including one-to-one support. Work in small groups and additional tuition support students' work in mathematics and writing well.
- Attainment on entry to the academy is a little lower than the standards expected nationally at this age. Children make a good start in the Early Years Foundation Stage and continue to achieve well in the primary years. Their progress and attainment are improving through Key Stages 1 and 2, but not equally well across all subjects.
- In 2014, pupils in Key Stage 1 attained better standards than in 2013. Progress was better in reading and mathematics than in writing, so writing is an academy improvement priority in the primary school. The proportion of pupils who met the nationally expected standard in the Year 1 phonics (sounds and the letters represented) screening check was below the latest national average in 2014; a considerable number of pupils were close to meeting the standard. Results in Year 2 of those retaking the screening check were above the latest national average. The academy has refined its delivery of phonics, and current data show improving results.
- Results at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014 improved on those in 2013 in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils in danger of falling behind in their reading and writing were quickly identified and given extra support through small group and one-to-one work, which led to better progress and improved results. The proportion making good progress is rising rapidly.
- A few American pupils join the primary or early years provision prior to starting their formal American curriculum at the nearby service bases. They make similar progress to that of others, are well integrated and carefully supported because staff know their starting points and learning needs.
- Students are not entered early for examinations in any GCSE subjects.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with that of others across the school. Students' learning needs are accurately identified and programmes modified to ensure they receive extra support when necessary.
- Gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and their classmates are closing because of early identification and improved monitoring, but not as fast as nationally. The few looked after children make good progress. Disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 were about three terms behind others in mathematics and slightly less in English in 2013. Pupils were about a grade and a half behind others in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 in 2013. The gap reduced in 2014 in both subjects, and is continuing to narrow with other students both in the academy and nationally. Data for the current Year 11 show that gaps are narrowing at a faster rate than previously.

The early years provision

is good

- Provision is good. Skills on entry to Reception are usually a little below what is expected nationally. Children enter with stronger skills in letters and sounds. Social skills are sometimes weaker. In 2014, the majority reached a good level of development in all the early learning goals – a considerable improvement on the previous year.
- Current data indicate that all groups of children, including the more able, the disabled and those who have special educational needs, have sustained the good achievement of the previous cohort. Reading and writing skills are developing well because of the emphasis on thorough understanding of phonics through regular practice of skills. Number skills are reinforced by the good range of staff support and helpful materials.
- Teaching is good. Teachers and support staff plan together and work closely with children to meet all needs. The indoor and outdoor spaces are used well, with plenty of free choice to build on their interests. Displays and plentiful material resources reinforce learning. All children, including the most able, are well challenged to learn. There is regular assessment to confirm progress is good.

- Children have positive attitudes to learning and behave well. They work cooperatively with adults and each other. Children are kept safe. Staff are well trained in safety matters and the children learn how to stay safe.
- Some children join from the nearby American military bases. While in the Early Years Foundation Stage, they make similarly good progress to that of other children.
- Leadership is good. Assessment and targets set are accurate and challenging. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress. Prior to starting, children and parents are visited at home to ensure that parents, children and staff work together as a team. Leaders also visit all nursery settings to ensure smooth transition.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- The sixth form requires improvement because leaders have not ensured that achievement and teaching are consistently good.
- The range of courses on offer has not been broad enough to fully meet the aspirations of students. The academy is working closely with its sponsor and other providers to broaden the range of courses and raise students' aspirations and staying-on rates at age 16. This relatively new work lacks measurable impact so far.
- Students' attainment prior to advanced course entry is lower than in most sixth forms. In 2014, more students gained higher grades at A level than in previous years. The few disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs achieve in line with other sixth formers at all levels. Although attainment at AS level has been weaker than at A level, the academy's additional monitoring and support show most students are on track to do better, due to greater challenge than previously. Many students did not complete their courses in 2013. Successful completions greatly increased in 2014 and more students went on to higher education.
- Teaching is improving. Teachers have better subject knowledge than previously, use questioning well to check on students' understanding and modify tasks to ensure better progress. As a result, students are making better progress now.
- Students' positive attitudes are shown by regular attendance, good behaviour and good participation in lessons. They enjoy good relationships with teachers and each other and help younger students – for example, to develop reading skills.
- More regular tracking, monitoring and reviews of progress are being conducted, but are still not thorough enough, including of the impact of external provision. The academy has appointed a senior leader to head the sixth form and introduced trial examinations to help avoid underachievement. Regular observations of teaching and learning are improving the quality of teaching by providing teachers with clear guidance on how to improve. Communication with parents has improved with a regular bulletin.

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	139058
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	447822

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	745
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Muir
Principal	Gee Cook
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01366 728333
Fax number	01366 728905
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