

Shire Oak Academy

Lichfield Road, Walsall, WS9 9PA

Inspection dates 20–21 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The Principal and senior leadership team provide strong and effective leadership. Their drive and ambition have brought about improvements in students' achievement and the quality of teaching.
- Governors use their wide range of experience and knowledge to support and, increasingly, challenge the senior leadership team to improve the quality of teaching and raise students' achievement.
- The proportion of students gaining at least five GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, is typically above average. This represents good progress given students' starting points.
- Teaching is mostly good, with some that is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations and good subject knowledge which they use effectively to engage students in their learning.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress because of the well-tailored support they receive.
- The gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and their classmates is starting to narrow because of the better-targeted additional support that they receive.
- Students behave exceptionally well and show high levels of respect for staff and each other. They are immensely proud of the academy and are keen to succeed in their learning.
- Students say they feel very well cared for. The academy's work to keep them safe is outstanding.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a range of sporting and cultural opportunities. Students appreciate the way the academy celebrates different cultures and they have a clear understanding of British values of respect and tolerance.
- The sixth form is good. It is well led, and students benefit from good teaching and achieve well. They are given good support and guidance and are well prepared for the next stage in their learning and for future employment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Marking of students' work is inconsistent. Teachers do not always give students enough guidance on how to improve their work.
- At times, the work set for students is not challenging enough.
- Best practice in teaching is not shared widely enough across the academy.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 47 lessons to observe the progress and engagement of students. Four of these observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Other aspects of the academy day were observed, including assembly, registration time, and students' behaviour at break, lunchtime and between lessons, and students' arrival and departure from the academy.
- Inspectors reviewed the quality of the work in students' books to judge the effectiveness of marking, students' progress and the accuracy of the academy's assessment data.
- Discussions were held with the Principal, senior staff and subject leaders, and five groups of students. A meeting took place with four governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body, and a discussion was held with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including: the academy's data on students' progress; self-evaluation and improvement plans; training arrangements for teachers and other staff; checks on the quality of teaching; attendance records and behaviour logs; minutes of governing body meetings; documents relating to students' safety; and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 96 parents and carers who responded to the Parent View online questionnaire as well as an e-mail from a parent and a telephone conversation with a parent. They also considered the 137 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Ann Behan, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Andrew Cornish	Additional inspector
Joseph Skivington	Additional inspector
Glenn Mayoh	Additional inspector
Paul Holroyd	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Shire Oak Academy converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2011. When its predecessor school, Shire Oak School (A Science College), was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The academy is a larger-than-average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds, with a small proportion from minority ethnic groups. The proportions who speak English as an additional language, or who are at an early stage in learning English, are well below average.
- Just over a quarter of the students are supported by the pupil premium, which is a similar proportion to the national average. This is additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is a tenth of the academy's population, which is below the national average.
- The academy has a specialist resource unit for 10 of its own Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students who have dyslexia-related learning difficulties.
- A very small number of Key Stage 4 students receive part of their education away from the academy site. These students are following work-related courses at: Walsall College; Teens and Tots, Walsall; and Knaves Court Care Home, Walsall.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' achievement and progress by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching to outstanding so that all students make more rapid progress, by making sure that all teachers:
 - mark students' work regularly, tell them how to improve it, and check that they follow the advice given
 - plan learning activities that are sufficiently challenging for students of different abilities.
- Strengthen the management of teaching and learning by providing more opportunities for all teachers to learn from the very best practice across the academy.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The academy is impressively well led by the Principal and the senior leadership team. They have high expectations and have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy. They have worked effectively to raise achievement and improve teaching. They are very well supported by staff at all levels.
 - Subject and team leaders play an important part in monitoring the work of the academy and are increasingly held accountable for the success of their areas of responsibility. Systematic monitoring of teaching and learning, supported by well-targeted training, has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and has raised students' achievement. There are some opportunities for teachers and leaders to share ideas and learn from each other within the academy but this is not done consistently well within, or across, departments.
 - Performance management systems have recently been revised. These are now rigorous and robust and are linked closely to high-quality professional development. These systems are used to support and challenge teachers who need to do more to make sure that all the students they teach make enough progress. Teaching staff have to meet exacting targets in order to be rewarded financially.
 - Senior leaders are determined to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students. They have undertaken a full review of how pupil premium funding has been used and have revised the support that is given to these students. They have appointed additional teachers and high-level teaching assistants in English and mathematics, so that more intensive help can be given. As a result, disadvantaged students are making more rapid progress, particularly at Key Stage 3, and the gap between them and other students is narrowing.
 - The academy provides a wide range of courses that are regularly reviewed to check that they match students' abilities and interests. There is a strong emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy skills, which prepares students for the next stage in their education. Partnerships with the local primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, and good internal and external careers advice, aid students' progression at different times in their education. Almost all students are successful in moving to education or training at the end of Year 11, and the majority of students leaving the sixth form at the end of Year 13 go on to universities of their choice.
 - The academy has very strong links with 10 local primary schools. It provides opportunities for Year 5 and Year 6 pupils from these schools to spend time at the academy taking part in science and mathematics lessons. This allows staff to share expertise and for primary school pupils to gain experience of learning in the academy.
 - Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well through a variety of activities in assemblies, lessons and through many after-school clubs and educational visits. The academy celebrates a wide range of cultures and religions, promoting British values of tolerance and respect well.
 - The academy makes sure that all students have the same opportunities to take part in all aspects of academy life. There is no evidence of discrimination in the academy.
 - The academy has a very positive relationship with the local authority. It takes part in training and joint ventures organised by the local authority and collaborates well with other schools in the area.
 - Arrangements for safeguarding are thorough, including the risk assessments for when students are educated off site. The academy liaises well with providers of off-site and work-related courses, and closely checks the attendance, behaviour, safety and progress of the students who attend the alternative provision.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governors have an impressive range of skills through the training that they have received, and through their own experience in education and business. They are well informed about the academy's strengths and areas for improvement, and take an effective, strategic approach to supporting and challenging senior leaders.
 - Governors are able to use data to compare how well students are achieving compared to others nationally. They have a good understanding of the quality of teaching in the academy through reports and presentations from the Principal and other senior staff, visits to the academy, work scrutiny and through talking to staff, parents and students.
 - The governing body makes sure all statutory child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures meet current national requirements, and are clear about the need to promote British values of tolerance and respect.

- Governors oversee the systems for performance management well, making sure that teachers' performance and pay are closely linked to the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
- Governors manage the finances of the academy well. They have well-thought-out plans for maintaining and improving the fabric of the building. They look closely at how additional government funding is spent and have a good overview of the impact this has on the achievement of disadvantaged students.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. There is a calm and happy atmosphere around the academy. Students are very polite and considerate towards adults and towards one another. Students respect their learning environment and take care of the building and equipment. There is little evidence of litter or graffiti.
- Students are proud to attend the academy and their attitudes to learning are excellent. They wear their uniform with pride, are punctual to lessons, bring the correct equipment, and respond positively and quickly to staff's requests. They are eager to learn, collaborate well in groups and in pairs, and take pride in their work. Sixth form students are excellent role models through their positive and mature attitudes to learning and their mentoring of younger students.
- Students are very positive about the relationships that they have with their teachers. They told inspectors that lessons run smoothly, that poor behaviour is rare and that rules are consistently and fairly applied by staff. They are pleased with the opportunities that they are given to earn rewards for good behaviour and work. This is reflected in the academy's tracking records, which show that incidents of unacceptable behaviour have been reduced, as have the number of exclusions, and the number of rewards has risen.
- Students' attendance has improved over the last year to be above average. The number of students who are persistent absentees has reduced because of the work that the academy has done to raise parents' awareness of the benefits of good attendance, and the intensive support that it has given to families of students with previously high rates of absence.
- The behaviour of students in alternative provision is checked carefully by the academy. These students typically behave very well.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. There are rigorous systems in place for health and safety and child protection that all staff follow diligently.
- Students are very positive about the support that they receive from the pastoral system. One student said, 'The pastoral team are always there for us.' Almost all of the parents who responded to Parent View reflected this view. They felt students were safe, well cared for and happy at the academy.
- In assemblies, registration time, special themed days and lessons, teachers give students a good understanding of how to stay safe. They cover a variety of themes about the importance of healthy lifestyles and the dangers and adverse effects of drugs and substance abuse. They explain how to use modern technology safely and about the dangers of the internet and social media.
- Students are aware of different kinds of bullying, including racist behaviour, homophobic and cyber-bullying. They told inspectors that bullying is rare and, on the few occasions that it happens, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff.
- Students make a good contribution to the running of the academy through the school council, house systems, older students helping younger students to improve their reading, and as ambassadors at various academy events.
- Leaders ensure that students who attend alternative provision are kept safe and are well cared for by staff.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good, and some is outstanding. Teachers use good subject knowledge to plan work that engages and motivates students to do well. They give clear explanations and skilfully question students to gauge understanding and adapt their teaching styles to respond to different students' learning and progress.
- Most teachers plan work that is challenging and builds well on students' prior learning but a few do not always use assessment information to plan activities that challenge students of different abilities.

Consequently, not all students make the rapid progress that they could.

- Highly qualified teaching assistants work well alongside teachers to give good support to disabled students and those who have special educational needs. They make a considerable contribution to the good and sometimes rapid progress of these students through one-to-one support and the help they provide for small groups in and outside of the classroom. Increasingly, they are making a valuable contribution to the learning of those students who are supported by the pupil premium, so that progress for these students is improving and the gap in achievement between them and other students in the academy is starting to narrow.
- High-quality support is given to those students for whom English is an additional language. This helps them to develop their language skills quickly, which in turn supports their good achievement in a range of subjects.
- There has been a considerable focus on the teaching of reading and students are encouraged to read widely in registration periods, in lessons and at home. The academy has a well-resourced library which is very popular with students and it has put in place systems where older students support younger students with their reading. This is having a positive effect across all subjects, particularly in raising standards in reading, speaking and listening.
- Regular and thorough marking in many subjects provides helpful guidance to students on how to improve their work and students are usually given the opportunity to reflect on, and respond to, advice given. However, this quality is not uniform across all subjects. In mathematics, science and humanities, written feedback sometimes does not contain enough detail on how to improve work. The best marking was seen in English, art and modern languages.
- Most teachers use homework well to support and extend students' knowledge and understanding.
- Almost all of the parents who responded to Parent View felt that their children are taught well.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students' attainment on entry to the academy has improved over the past few years so that students currently in Key Stage 3 entered with standards above the national average. However, students who took GCSE examinations in 2013 and 2014 entered with attainment that was in line with the national average. By the end of Year 11, the proportion of students gaining five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, in 2013 and 2014 was above the national average, which represents good achievement given these students' starting points.
- Results in 2014 showed that the proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress in English was above national figures. In mathematics, the proportion was broadly in line with national figures. Examination results in science improved markedly particularly at the higher grades. The academy's assessment data, and work in books, show that current Year 11 students are making good progress across all subjects.
- In 2013, in GCSE English and mathematics, disadvantaged students were roughly a grade behind their classmates and three quarters of a grade behind other students nationally. In 2014, in English this narrowed to just under two thirds of a grade behind their classmates and less than a third of a grade behind other students nationally. However, in mathematics, in 2014, the gap widened to one grade behind their classmates and students nationally. Academy assessments and work seen in books show that the gap in English in the current Year 11 is more or less the same, and in mathematics it is narrowing. However, at Key Stage 3 the gaps between disadvantaged students and their classmates is narrowing quickly in English and mathematics because of the recently improved additional support that these students are receiving.
- The achievement of the most able students is good and is improving. Most staff plan more challenging tasks for this group of students. The progress of the most able has been stronger in English, modern languages and science than in mathematics. However, current information shows that their attainment is improving across all subjects and the number gaining the highest grades is increasing.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve at least as well as other students because the academy provides additional support for each student tailored to meet their particular needs.
- Students from different ethnic groups achieve equally well. Those who speak English as an additional language make good progress across a range of subjects.
- Students eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding make good progress in developing their basic skills, particularly in literacy, because of the effective teaching and additional support that they receive. The academy's focus on reading during lessons and registration time is helping these students catch up with their classmates.

- Students who attend the academy's specialist support unit make at least good progress, because of the intensive one-to-one support that they receive from specially qualified teachers and teaching assistants.
- The few Key Stage 4 students who study off site make good progress because of good-quality, well-planned provision.
- The academy does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.

The sixth form provision

is good

- As a result of good teaching and positive attitudes to learning, achievement in the sixth form is good. In the majority of academic subjects, students achieve at least as well as the national average, and above the national average for work-related subjects.
- Teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. Teachers use good subject knowledge to plan work to cater for the different abilities across groups and subjects. This ensures that progress rates are similar for all groups, including disabled students, those who have special educational needs, and disadvantaged students.
- The curriculum is broad and provides academic and vocational courses to cater for students' different interests and abilities. It meets the requirements of the 16–19 programmes of study and prepares students well for work or future learning. Those students who enter the sixth form with a GCSE level that is below grade C for English or mathematics are provided with good support to enable them to do well when they re-take examinations.
- Students' behaviour around the academy and their attitudes to learning are exemplary and they provide excellent role models for younger students. They contribute greatly to supporting the academy's activities by listening to students read, mentoring younger students, carrying out duties in the library before school, at break and lunchtime, and acting as ambassadors at different academy events.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form carefully monitors students' progress and provides additional help for students who are in danger of falling behind. Students receive high-quality support and careers guidance from the careers advisor and the head of sixth form. Retention rates are improving, and attendance and punctuality are good. Students are given good advice on how to stay safe in various situations.

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	136620
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	448880

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,438
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kevin Hubery
Principal	Gary Crowther
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01543 452518
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