

The ACE Academy

Alexandra Road, Tipton, DY4 7NR

Inspection dates 12–13 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	Inadequate 4
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils	Inadequate	4
Sixth form provision	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Achievement is inadequate. Too few students make the progress they should, especially in English, mathematics and science. The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students is widening in English and mathematics.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do not make the progress expected of them.
- The most-able students are not sufficiently challenged. As a consequence, they make inadequate progress.
- Students have large gaps in their knowledge due to inadequate teaching over time, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
- Students' literacy and numeracy skills are poorly developed. School leaders' actions to tackle this have been ineffective.
- Teachers' expectations of what students are able to achieve are low. Teaching assistants do not always know how to develop the understanding of the less able students they support. Students' lack of work in lessons is often unchallenged by teachers.
- Many teachers do not have an accurate view of what students know and can do. As a result, they do not plan or deliver learning activities that develop, consolidate or speed-up students' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Students' spiritual, moral and social development, including behaviour, is inadequate because many students show a reluctance to learn. Low-level disruption frequently hinders students' learning. Students' behaviour around the academy is inadequate. As a consequence, many younger students feel unsafe.
- The sixth form is inadequate because too many students underachieve or do not complete their courses. Statutory 16-19 programmes are not fully implemented. The provision for students who have not yet achieved a good GCSE grade in English or mathematics is inadequate.
- The headteacher and other recently appointed leaders have had limited time to make significant improvements in achievement, teaching, students' behaviour and in the sixth form. Improvement plans are not precise enough. Governors have not adequately challenged leaders about the academy's performance.

The school has the following strengths

- Students' attainment in the sixth form is improving in chemistry, biology, mathematics and history.
- The recently appointed headteacher has quickly started to tackle the large number of issues caused by a history of poor leadership and management.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 48 lessons, including 10 jointly with senior staff. The work in students' books was evaluated. There were also a number of short visits to classes including tutor time and assemblies.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of students as they arrived at the academy, during lesson changeovers, at break and lunchtimes, as they left the academy premises at the end of the day as well as in lessons.
- Account was taken of the 20 responses on Parent View, Ofsted's on-line questionnaire, and the 52 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors looked at important documents including the examination results and records of students' assessment. They scrutinised the academy's policies and procedures for safeguarding and child protection. They examined records relating to students' behaviour and attendance and documents used by leaders and governors to check the work of the staff at the academy.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, academy leaders, including heads of subject, representatives of the governing body and the academy sponsor, Education Central Multi-Academy Trust (ECMAT). Meetings were also held with students of different ages, abilities and backgrounds. They discussed achievement, learning, teaching, behaviour and safety.

Inspection team

Peter Humphries, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Helen Reeves

Seconded Inspector

Mark Capel

Seconded Inspector

Andrew Vind

Additional Inspector

Stephen Hopkins

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- The ACE Academy opened in March 2013 and is sponsored by Education Central Multi-Academy Trust. This is the academy's first inspection.
- The academy is larger than the average sized secondary school.
- An above average proportion of students, 47%, are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority).
- The majority of students, 66%, are of White British heritage.
- At 20%, the proportion of students who have special educational needs is just above the national average.
- Twenty five students from Key Stage 3 and 4 attend a range of alternative provision at Whiteheath Hospital provision, Impact apprenticeship provider, Batman's Hill Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), Dudley College Youth Skills, Wheels alternative education provider, Albion Foundation, Krunch community centre, Ruskin House PRU and Oakham PRU.
- The academy does not meet the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement, especially in English, mathematics and science by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan and deliver activities that have clear learning intentions and are pitched at a level of difficulty that meets the needs of all groups of students
 - students' work is accurately assessed during and after lessons so that the new work teachers then set enables all groups of students to make rapid progress
 - all marking and feedback show students exactly what they need to do to improve their work and that teachers systematically check that students quickly act upon this advice
 - teachers demand consistently high standards of work and effort from the students in their classes, especially the most-able students
 - teaching assistants receive better training in how to support less-able students who do not understand how to tackle the problems they are set
 - students have the necessary skills to solve problems and to persevere when difficulties are encountered
 - students have opportunities to develop their literacy, communication and numeracy skills in all subjects.
- Improve the support for disadvantaged students so that they make at least expected progress and that increasing numbers make more than expected progress in English and mathematics at GCSE.
- Improve the overall effectiveness of the sixth form by ensuring:
 - the statutory sixth form study programmes are fully implemented
 - good practice seen in the teaching of chemistry, biology, history and mathematics is shared with teachers of all other subjects
 - students make appropriate subject and career choices by receiving high-quality work experience, information, advice and guidance
 - the number of students leaving the sixth form before the end of their courses is reduced
 - all students who do re-sit examinations in English and mathematics at GCSE level improve their Year 11

grade.

- Urgently improve the effectiveness of leadership and management, including governance, so that students' achievement and behaviour rapidly improves by ensuring that:
 - academy improvement plans identify all the key priorities for raising standards, that milestones to measure progress are challenging, specific and measurable and that methods, timescales and staff responsible for monitoring evaluating and reviewing the work of the academy are clear
 - subject leaders, including the head of sixth form, have the skills to monitor, evaluate and review their work and are held to account for students' progress
 - leaders at all levels are capable of delivering improvement priorities
 - current initiatives to improve the quality of teaching are embedded so that all teachers get the help, support and guidance they need to teach all groups of students effectively and, in doing so, raise achievement
 - procedures to manage the performance of teachers are consistently applied so that underperformance is eradicated
 - teachers promote and enforce the academy's policies on behaviour and anti-bullying so that all students feel safe while in the academy
 - the curriculum more effectively supports the development of students' basic literacy and numeracy skills and meets the requirements for the teaching of religious education in Year 10
 - funds available through the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding are spent appropriately so that all students eligible for this support make better progress
 - members of the governing body hold leaders and managers to account for all aspects of the academy's performance.

An external review of governance and an external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Ineffective leadership and management at all levels, including governance, since the school became an academy has resulted in students underachieving, particularly in English, mathematics and science. The actions taken by the newly appointed leadership team to reverse the decline in students' achievement and behaviour have not resulted in sustained improvements.
- Systems for checking the work of the academy are ineffective and do not reflect the decline in achievement, the inadequate quality of teaching and students' poor behaviour and attitudes to learning. Subject leaders and teachers do not have an accurate view of students' attainment and progress. As a consequence, there is a pattern of inaccurate predictions about how well students are doing or will do in their examinations in many subjects.
- Plans for improvement over time are ineffective. Leaders have not identified key priorities to improve students' outcomes. As a consequence, students' progress in literacy, communication and numeracy remains weak. The quality of teaching, while improving in places, is inadequate. Students' behaviour is inadequate.
- Several subject and middle leaders are not clear about their roles and responsibilities. They do not ensure that teachers consistently promote and enforce the academy's new policies on learning and teaching and managing students' behaviour. As a result, many students do not work hard enough in lessons, produce little or no work and fail to meet the academy's behaviour and uniform expectations.
- The leadership of teaching is inadequate. Students' achievement across the academy, including in the sixth form, is inadequate as a result of poor teaching over time. Too many teachers plan activities that keep students occupied rather than improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders have not started to develop the academy's preferred approach to assessment without levels. Students told inspectors that many lessons are covered by supply teachers.
- The curriculum is ineffective in raising achievement and in improving students' behaviour. It does not enable students to make sufficient progress in developing their literacy, communication and numeracy skills or ensure students are well prepared for further education, employment or training. The Year 10 range of subjects does not include the teaching of religious education. As a consequence, the academy is not complying with the Department for Education's funding agreement. The academy does not promote equal opportunities effectively as students whose circumstances make them vulnerable do not make the progress expected.
- The academy does provide students with information and guidance to help them make their examination choices and inform in their next steps when leaving the academy. However, a significant minority of students do not find education, employment or training opportunities when they leave the academy at the end of Year 11, 12 and 13.
- The academy does not enter students early for their GCSE examinations.
- Safeguarding procedures in the academy are sound. However, until recently, academy staff did not carefully monitor the progress or attendance of students placed in alternative provision.
- The promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is not effective in ensuring all students demonstrate tolerance, respect and understanding of other people. There is a balanced programme of activities, including assemblies, which provide opportunities for students to reflect on issues such as 'what is right and wrong?' and 'what it means to be British'. However, the behaviour of a minority of older students is anti-social. Sixth formers told inspectors that they do not have enough opportunities to help around the academy or local community and would welcome the chance to support younger students with their work.
- Pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding is not spent effectively to improve the outcomes for students.

As a consequence, students who are in receipt of these grants underachieve compared to their peers in the academy and nationally.

- The new headteacher is under no illusions about the weaknesses and deep-rooted inadequacies in the academy. He has brought a much needed sense of vision, purpose, and urgency to the academy and his sense of urgency is now being shared by some, though by no means all, staff. He has introduced new policies and procedures for monitoring and reviewing the work of teachers and leaders. However, he has had insufficient time for these to take effect or to embed a culture of high expectations and aspirations that lead to sustained improvements in students' achievement and behaviour.
- The academy sponsor has tackled the legacy of poor leadership and management, appointed a new leadership team and provided appropriate challenge and support in order to move the academy forward. Representatives of the sponsor have an accurate view of students' achievement and behaviour and of the quality of teaching and acknowledge the new leadership team have much to do to raise standards.
- Inspectors strongly recommend that the academy should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have not been effective in challenging the performance of the academy. They do not know enough about how students are achieving, do not receive useful information about the impact of the pupil premium or the Year 7 catch-up fund and have not discussed how these should be allocated to improve achievement. Governors do not have a clear understanding of the quality of teaching. They have not been involved in the recruitment or appraisal of teachers. As a consequence, some teachers have been promoted to positions of responsibility without having the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to do their job. Governors are informed about safeguarding and have ensured the academy's safeguarding procedures meet current requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is inadequate. Many are polite and courteous and show kindness and respect to each other. However, a significant minority of students use foul and abusive language, bully other students and behave badly in lessons and around the academy. During the inspection students were observed smoking cigarettes on the academy playing fields and using their mobile phones in lessons.
- Many students are removed from lessons or excluded because their behaviour falls below the higher expectations set since September 2014. Several students do not have positive attitudes to learning, lack resilience when they encounter problems and rely too heavily on teachers and teaching assistants to complete their work. As a consequence, when adults in the classroom are unavailable, students disrupt the learning of others. Several teachers do not challenge students when they behave badly or refuse to complete work to an appropriate standard.
- In many subjects the work in students' books is poor. Work is incomplete, scruffy and inaccurate. Students often do not respond to teachers' feedback. Many teachers fail to challenge these poor attitudes to learning.
- Students' behaviour in the morning and at break and lunchtimes is inadequate. Many students do not take responsibility for their own behaviour. Staff have to work hard to move groups of students to lessons and to remind them to be considerate of others. Students drop litter in the dining areas, in corridors and around the academy site.
- Students told inspectors that behaviour in the academy is improving and uniform is worn more consistently in line with expectations. They appreciate the new headteacher's determination to improve students' behaviour.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is inadequate. The behaviour of a minority of older

students causes many younger students to feel unsafe. Students told inspectors that some older students are 'nasty'.

- The majority of students, staff and parents believe that staff keep students safe and well cared for. However, many staff do not challenge students when they behave inappropriately. As a result, there are times when staff do not ensure that all pupils feel safe and secure in and around the academy.
- The majority of students have a good awareness of the different types of bullying. They say that they feel confident in raising any concerns they may have and that teachers and other adults will deal with any bullying issues. However, some groups of students told inspectors that actions taken by teachers to address bullying issues are not always effective and not followed through. Students' attendance is improving and is in line with national figures. The academy has appropriate systems for checking on students who are absent including those who are at alternative provision.
- The vetting checks on staff are up-to-date and meet requirements. The new leadership team has ensured staff recruitment and induction procedures are appropriate. Child protection cases are reported clearly and actions taken to ensure students are safe are suitable. Staff new to the academy have had child protection training and existing staff have regular child protection training updates.

The quality of teaching is inadequate

- Teaching over time is inadequate because it has failed to meet students' needs and aspirations. As a result, students' levels of progress and attainment are very low, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
- Teachers' expectations of what students know and can do are too low. Although teaching is improving, as a result of recent training, there is still an overwhelming lack of urgency or clear focus on how to overcome the inadequate progress made by students in the past. For example, students in Year 9 do not have the basic mathematical skills to check their answers or to understand more challenging work. The academy does not have a homework policy or timetable. As a result, homework is set inconsistently. Students told inspectors that not all teachers set homework.
- In most subjects, teachers do not use the information they have about students' abilities to plan and deliver activities that develop or consolidate their knowledge, skills and understanding. As a consequence, students complete the same work which is too hard for some and too easy for others. This results in many students, especially the most- and least-able and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, making inadequate progress.
- Teachers do not accurately assess students' work in order to modify lessons or to plan lessons that meet the students' needs. As a result, students' misunderstandings and misconceptions are not identified and corrected.
- The majority of feedback to students focuses on praising effort and not on what students need to do to improve their work. Consequently, students do not know how to make their work better.
- A large number of students do not have the skills to solve problems or to overcome difficulties. As a result, many students rely too heavily on help from the teacher and teaching assistant to complete their work. Some teaching assistants ask challenging questions of students to encourage them to think about their answers and the work they are doing. Other teaching assistants just tell students the answers.
- The teaching of reading is not good enough. Students' basic literacy and numeracy skills are undeveloped. There are too few opportunities provided across other subjects to develop these skills in a systematic and effective way. Intervention work is not focused on students' needs and class tutors who are expected to deliver phonics sessions (the sounds letters make) do not have the necessary skills to do so effectively. As a result many students, including those who are in receipt of the pupil premium grant, are not making the progress expected of them.

- Where teaching is good, activities are stimulating and well matched to the needs and abilities of the students. Teachers accurately assess when students need extra help or can move on to harder work. Adults expect students to complete work to a high standard and to act on the advice they provide. This is particularly evident in the sixth form in biology, chemistry, history and mathematics. As a result, students are enthusiastic about, and fully focused on, their learning.

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Students' attainment is very low in the majority of subjects. Too few students make the progress expected of them nationally particularly in English, mathematics and science. Weak teaching over time has meant that standards are not improving quickly enough.
- The most- and least-able students make insufficient progress. The proportions that attain the highest grades at GCSE are low. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make inadequate progress. Teachers do not use data well enough to check the progress of these groups and do not provide the support and guidance they need.
- Information provided by the academy shows that disadvantaged students attained two grades lower in mathematics and over a grade lower in English than non-disadvantaged students nationally. They attained over a grade lower than non-disadvantaged students in the academy in mathematics and two thirds of a grade lower in English. Attendance for disadvantaged students is also lower than for other students, and this has a negative impact on their achievement.
- Leaders and managers, including governors, have not measured the impact of the Year 7 catch-up spending. As a consequence, they are unable to say if those students who are eligible for the funding are improving their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Students' weak literacy, communication and numeracy skills stop them making better progress in most subjects. Leaders' actions to tackle this have been weak and ineffectual. The academy's plans to raise standards do not focus sufficiently on improving students' basic skills.
- Academy leaders are not able to measure the progress and attainment of students attending alternative provision as they have not sufficiently monitored this group of students in the past.

The sixth form provision

is inadequate

- Students enter the sixth form with achievement that is broadly average. From this starting point the majority of students make inadequate progress. The results for academic subjects are below the national 16-19 minimum standards. Students' attainment in vocational subjects is inconsistent and in some subjects they achieve results which are well below national averages.
- The academy does not meet the requirements of the 16-19 programmes because the provision for English and mathematics is inadequate. All the students entered for GCSE retakes failed to improve their Year 11 grade in mathematics and only one student improved their grade in English.
- The advice and guidance students receive before entering the sixth form has, until very recently, been poor. Students have taken courses that are not matched to their abilities. As a result, many students leave the sixth form at the end of Year 12. In Year 13, there is insufficient advice and guidance to those students who wish to enter employment or take up apprenticeships. Many students who leave the sixth form at the end of Year 12 and 13 do not enter further education, employment or training.
- Leaders of the sixth form lack experience. They are enthusiastic and willing. However, there is a lack of vision for the sixth form. The academy's improvement plans do not adequately focus on improving the curriculum, quality of teaching and the monitoring, evaluation and review of the academy's work in the sixth form.

- Students have insufficient opportunities to participate in high quality work experience and extracurricular activities. As a consequence, their social and employability skills are inadequately developed.
- Teaching in the sixth form is more effective than in the rest of the academy, particularly in chemistry, biology, mathematics and history. As a result, information provided by the academy shows that students in these subjects are making better progress. However, teaching is still inconsistent in many subjects.
- Sixth form students behave well and feel safe in the academy. They wear their grey business suits with pride and are well-turned-out. They are good role models for younger students. The majority of students use their free time effectively in order to revise or do research.
- Students who spoke with inspectors said that they would like academy leaders to consult them more often about how they could help the academy improve. They would welcome the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the life of the academy.

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	139328
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	447841

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	1449
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	126
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stewart Towe
Headteacher	Robin Grover
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0121 521 1540
Fax number	0121 521 1540
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