

University Academy Warrington

Insall Road, Warrington, WA2 0LN

Inspection dates 25–26 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3
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

- Achievement requires improvement. Across Years 7 to 11, not enough students make more than the expected rate of progress in a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics.
- Standards by the end of Year 11 in 2014 fell. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs, including English and mathematics, at grade A*-C was below average.
- Teaching requires improvement. Expectations of what students are capable of achieving are not always high enough and sometimes their work lacks challenge.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent. Not all students are clear about how to improve. Students do not always act upon the advice given to improve their work.
- Not all students, at present, are taught by appropriately skilled English teachers; consequently some progress in English requires improvement.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Teaching is variable in quality; as a result, students do not make good progress other than in vocational subjects.
- Across the academy, there is not yet a strong enough focus and impact on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, including in the various curriculum subjects.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are not always positive. Where work lacks challenge, students' enthusiasm wanes and results in some low-level disruptive behaviour. Approaches to behaviour management in lessons are inconsistent. Not all staff have high expectations of how students should behave.
- Middle leaders are not yet fully effective in ensuring that the teaching of groups of students is consistently good and that students behave well.

The school has the following strengths

- The new leadership in place from the beginning of the academic year is impacting positively on the academy's performance. Self-evaluation and improvement planning are now accurate and rigorous.
- The Executive Principal, along with the new head of school are taking a strong lead on improving academy.
- The academy provides a safe and inclusive environment for its students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons. . Three observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also conducted a series of shorter observations in English in Key Stage 3.
- The inspection team conducted a detailed analysis of students’ written work across a range of subjects and year groups. This was done in partnership with academy leaders.
- The inspection team held meetings with senior and middle leaders, six groups of students, the new Chair of the Interim Executive Board (IEB) and representatives from the University of Chester Academies Trust.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including: self evaluation and development plans; data provided by the academy relating to students’ current attainment and progress; information on attendance; records of the monitoring of teaching and learning and minutes of meetings of the IEB.
- Inspectors reviewed the 83 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

John Townsley, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Gerard Fitzpatrick	Additional Inspector
Stephen Wall	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- University Academy Warrington became a sponsored academy under the University of Chester Academies Trust in January 2013. The academy is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The number of students on roll is falling.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported through the pupil premium is broadly average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Almost all students are White British.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is above average.
- The academy has a designated provision resource of 12 places for students with cognition and learning difficulties.
- Provisional data for 2014 shows that the academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Six students access off-site education at New Horizons, a provider of alternative provision.
- The academy and the Trust is supported by St John Plessington Teaching School Alliance and its Executive Principal. A new head of school, seconded from the Teaching School Alliance, has been in place since September 2014.
- The newly formed IEB is led by a national leader of governance and provides both challenge and support for academy leaders in their drive for improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least good and accelerate students' progress in all subjects, including in the sixth form, by making sure that:
 - teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving are consistently high
 - students of all abilities, especially the most able and those with special educational needs are appropriately challenged in their learning
 - the quality of marking improves so that all students are clear about their next steps in learning, and that students act upon the advice given to improve their work
 - a stronger focus is given to developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, including across the different curriculum subjects
 - all students are taught by appropriately skilled English teachers.
- Improve students' behaviour and their attitudes to learning so that they are at least consistently good by:
 - developing a consistent approach by teachers to managing students' behaviour in lessons
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour.
- Further improve the impact of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that:
 - middle leaders continue to develop high-quality teaching and learning in their teams in order to raise achievement more rapidly
 - the management of teaching and learning is better focused on improving learning activities and promoting the sharing of best practice
 - all leaders deal with poor behaviour robustly and consistently, and set high expectations around standards of behaviour
 - Leaders monitor the quality of teaching across the whole curriculum much more carefully and effectively.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- From the point of opening in January 2013, the Trust has only recently established an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy and the necessary actions required to bring about significant improvement. Leadership at Executive Principal and head of school level is now in place and important changes to the structure of governance and its leadership have now been established. This is beginning to ensure that the academy is providing greater equality of opportunity for all students to succeed.
- New leaders have acted with great effectiveness to introduce new systems to support improvement in the academy's performance. In a short period of time they have introduced robust self-evaluation, sharpened senior leaders' responsibilities and focus and given greater purpose and direction to students and staff to be more ambitious and self-critical. Leaders are very sharply focused on ensuring that the pupil premium funding is used very effectively to accelerate the progress of students for whom it is an entitlement.
- New leaders have also acted promptly regarding the sudden and unexpected departure of the majority of the English department, a number of whom are now on long-term absence from the academy. This development has resulted in students' current achievement in English requiring improvement. Leaders have taken prompt and decisive action to appoint new, experienced and well-qualified staff to the English department to take up post in January 2015.
- The school's evaluation of its own work has recently strengthened. Senior and middle leaders are now actively involved in checking the school's performance. As a result, areas for improvement are accurately identified among leaders at all levels. As an example, leaders are now sharply focused on ensuring that all students receive excellent guidance regarding careers and future learning.
- The leadership of teaching is improving. Information about how well students are doing is now being used more astutely to inform leaders about the strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Even so, leaders are yet to ensure that teaching is consistently good and ensure that best practice is shared.
- Until recently, middle leaders have not worked sufficiently well together to promote best practice and ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching. This has now changed and the middle leadership team is starting to emerge as a strong team in driving forward improvement.
- The academy's curriculum requires improvement because it has not enabled students to make good progress. Students' literacy and numeracy skills, for example, are not developed at a good rate. Leaders are now starting to place a stronger focus on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills, including across the curriculum subjects, but practice still remains too variable.
- Leaders have ensured that the small number of students who remain in the academy's sixth form are well cared for and given extensive support. The sixth form is not yet good because of the varied rates of progress made by students across all subjects from the point at which they enter the provision.
- The academy promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and there are some areas of very effective practice; for example in the promotion of British values.
- Those students accessing off-site provision are well catered for in terms of the curriculum they receive and the leadership ensures their progress, attendance and behaviour are appropriately monitored.
- The academy meets statutory requirements for safeguarding students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - New arrangements for governance in the form of an IEB, have resulted in a more detailed and critical view of the academy's performance set against national trends. The new Chair of the IEB, a National Leader of Governance, is bringing a more self-critical and robust challenge to senior leadership and the evaluation of the academy's performance is well supported by other governors.
 - Governors have a good understanding of the use of pupil premium funding, how it works and its impact on students' performance. Governors have taken appropriate steps to tackle the current short-term challenges the academy faces in the teaching of English.
 - Governors recognise the need to be more fully aware of how the academy is attempting to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Systems are now in place to ensure that good teaching is rewarded and that underperformance is challenged robustly.

The behaviour and safety of students

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Although the behaviour in lessons of most students is

typically good, sometimes the low-level disruptive behaviour of a few students in some lessons, particularly in lower ability sets in Key Stage 3, hinders students' achievement. A small group of lower-ability students in Year 8 are persistently disruptive in lessons.

- Students do not always show good attitudes to learning because where learning lacks challenge or expectations of what students can achieve are not high enough, students sometimes lose interest in their learning.
- Students' behaviour around the academy is good. Their conduct, for example, during a fire evacuation on the first day of the inspection was excellent. The very large majority are polite to one another and very welcoming to visitors. Students wear their uniform with pride.
- The academy is still at an early stage in establishing a cohesive and consistent behaviour policy which rewards positive students' performance and challenges unacceptable conduct and attitudes to learning. Consequently, some teachers remain unsure as to the correct procedures that are available to them when they encounter challenging behaviour.
- The behaviour and safety of students in alternative provision are good.
- The number of students excluded either permanently or for a fixed period of time is falling. Attendance has improved and is now broadly in line with the national average.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students confirmed in a range of discussions that they feel safe.
- The academy is very effective in its work on internet safety and the possible dangers of social media websites. Students are confident that where bullying does occur appropriate action is taken.
- The academy's work to tackle homophobia and to promote debate on mental health issues is excellent. Students speak very positively about their learning experiences in these matters.
- The physical well-being of students is promoted effectively through the curriculum and a range of extra-curricular sporting activities.
- The majority of parents confirm that their children are happy in the academy and are kept safe, including in any alternative provision.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement, including in English and mathematics, because its impact on achievement is not yet consistently good across the academy. As a result, students' progress is inconsistent and requires improvement.
- Teachers' expectations of what students are capable of achieving are not always high enough. Consequently, some students are not fully engaged in learning and make steady rather than good progress. The work provided does not always match students' varying abilities and often lacks challenge, including for the most-able students and those with special educational needs. Teachers' questions do not always encourage students to think deeply or to express their ideas and present solutions and this hampers their achievement.
- The quality of marking is variable. In examples of effective marking seen in students' books, teachers clearly assess how well students are learning, chart students' progress, ensure that students are very clear about their next steps in learning and check that students act upon the advice given to improve their work. As a result, students' good progress was evident. However, not all students benefit from this approach and as a result, do not make good progress.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy requires improvement. Teaching does not yet focus strongly enough on the development of students' basic skills, particularly in writing, to ensure that students' skills develop at consistently good rate.
- Some teaching enables students to achieve well. Learning is sharply focused and very challenging. In Year 11, students relished the level of specialist challenge using post-GCSE concepts in chemistry. In Year 7, the confidence levels of girls rose impressively to the challenges of a fast-moving session in netball skills.

The achievement of students

requires improvement

- The achievement of all groups of students across Years 7 and 11, including those in the resource-based provision, requires improvement. Most students are making at least expected progress but too few do

better than this across a wide range of subjects, including in English and mathematics.

- The proportion of students in Year 11 achieving grades A* to C, in five GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics, declined in 2014 and was lower than average. Academy data and inspection evidence indicates that attainment currently in Year 11 is higher. Students' attainment is at least in line with that expected nationally and represents expected progress from their typically broadly average starting points. Students' progress across the academy is now starting to speed up in many subjects, as a result of new leadership, improved departmental management and better teaching.
- In English, for some students, progress over time has been good. However, the sudden recent departure of several teaching staff from the English department and present temporary staffing arrangements has slowed the current rate of progress. Students are not being provided with the necessary challenge to ensure they make good progress. Achievement in English, therefore, requires improvement.
- Students' literacy and numeracy skills do not develop at a good rate as they move through the academy. There is not yet a strong enough focus on the use and application of these basic skills, in the various subjects.
- The achievement of disadvantaged students requires improvement. In 2014, for example, unvalidated data suggests that the proportion of disadvantaged students making or exceeding the expected rate of progress in Year 11 was similar to other students in the academy. Disadvantaged students' attainment in 2014 in English and mathematics was broadly in line with other students at the academy. In comparison with non-disadvantaged students nationally, evidence seen in students' current work in the academy indicates that disadvantaged students are beginning to perform more strongly than similar students nationally.
- The achievement of the most able students and those with special educational needs requires improvement. Expectations of what both these groups of students are capable of achieving are not high enough. They are not given work that enables them to reach their potential as too often work lacks challenge.
- Students who are educated off-site achieve well. They are very motivated, attend well and acquire new knowledge and skills quickly.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Students enter the sixth form with levels of attainment that are below average. By the end of Year 13, their attainment is also below average. Too few students make good progress from their previous starting points and, as a result, achievement requires improvement.
- Teaching requires improvement because it is too variable in quality. Although some teaching is good, students' work often lacks the necessary challenge to ensure students of varying abilities achieve well.
- The range of courses available to study is very narrow, reflecting the very small numbers of students in the sixth form.
- The academy's work to nurture and support all students is effective. Students speak very positively about the guidance and care they receive, particularly as they prepare to move on to the next stage of education, employment or training. Students behave well and show mature attitudes to their learning. They have a good understanding of issues relating to their safety. They enjoy the extra responsibilities given to them and act as strong role models to younger students at the academy.
- Leadership and management requires improvement. Although leaders ensure that students are well supported and encouraged in their learning, they are yet to ensure that teaching and achievement is consistently good.

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	139072
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	447844

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	572
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	22
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy Wilson
Head of school	Neil Harrison
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01925 822632
Fax number	01925 851418
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