

Swindon Academy

Beech Avenue, Swindon, SN2 1JR

Inspection dates

5–6 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
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

- Students' achievement requires improvement because not all students make as much progress as they should across a range of subjects.
- Students attain below-average standards at the end of Year 6 and Year 11 in English and mathematics. This is because of weak teaching in the past and significant disturbance through changes of staff.
- In 2014, disadvantaged students' attainment was below that of other students. The gap is now narrowing following actions resulting from more systematic assessment and checks on the progress being made.
- Boys do less well than girls in writing and in their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling by the end of Year 6.
- The achievement of the most able students is too variable because the activities set for them are not always challenging enough.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do not make consistently good progress, but they do achieve as well as other students in the academy.
- Teaching in subjects such as history, geography and modern foreign languages has not been consistently strong enough for students to make good progress.
- The quality of teaching and achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. Students have not achieved as well as they could over the last two years.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal, senior leaders and governors are ambitious for the students. They understand the academy's strengths and weaknesses and are working effectively together to make necessary improvements.
- Students have positive attitudes, enjoy their learning and are keen to learn. Rates of attendance have risen and are now above average.
- Students feel that the academy is a safe place. They have confidence that staff will listen to any concerns that they have and will act upon them.
- Children get off to a good start in the Reception and Nursery classes. They are provided with a strong foundation for learning which ensures they are ready to move into Year 1.
- Teaching is now typically good in English, mathematics and science in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Students are making good progress in these subjects.
- Governors are well informed and knowledgeable about the academy. They adopt a robust and rigorous approach to their role, and hold leaders to account well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes and visited 34 lessons, of which half were seen jointly with members of the school’s leadership team.
- Assemblies and tutorial sessions were visited. The inspection team also made short visits to lessons as part of four walks through the school to look at students’ attitudes to learning and behaviour.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students, talked informally to students at breaks and lunchtimes, and listened to students read.
- Meetings were held with staff, senior and subject leaders, the primary and secondary phase headteachers and the Principal. Inspectors also spoke to members of the governing body and representatives from United Learning.
- Inspectors looked at several documents, including the school’s evaluation of its own performance, plans for improvement, policies, and records of students’ behaviour and attendance. Safeguarding documents were also scrutinised.
- The 37 responses to the online survey, Parent View, were considered. Account was also taken of the findings of recent school surveys of the views of 500 parents and carers, and inspectors spoke to parents and carers and considered their written comments. Account was taken of the results of the school survey of 500 students. Inspectors noted the 147 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Robert Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Peter Clifton	Additional inspector
Jean Whalley	Additional inspector
Carol Worthington	Additional inspector
Stephanie Matthews	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average-sized all-through academy.
- The academy operates on two sites: the main site at Beech Avenue, where students from all age groups are taught, and another at Alton Close, for children aged from 3 to 11. It is divided into three phases, primary, secondary and sixth form. Students belong to one of four colleges within the academy.
- The academy is sponsored by United Learning and has specialisms in science with business and enterprise. It has particularly close links with Marlborough College, @Futsal, Honda UK and The White Horse Federation.
- About two thirds of students are eligible for the pupil premium. This is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for students who, in this school, are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students or those with special educational needs is above the national average.
- Almost all the school's students come from a White British background. A little less than one in 10 of the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds and a similar proportion speaks English as an additional language. This is below the national average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards at both Key Stage 4 and 5. These set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. Floor standards are not met at the end of Key Stage 2.
- A Nursery operates in both the morning and afternoon on both sites. The early years consists of four full-time Reception classes.
- The academy does not enter students early for GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11.
- A very small number of students in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 attend a specialist provision unit on a part- or full-time basis. This provision is funded by the academy. Almost 350 sixth form students attend full-time courses at @Futsal centres across England and Wales.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been a significant number of staff changes across the academy at all levels. New subject leaders have been appointed to several faculties including the humanities and modern foreign languages teams. New directors for the sixth form were appointed in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so it is consistently good or better across all phases by ensuring that:
 - teachers routinely plan and deliver lessons that are tailored to meet the different needs of students in each class, especially the most able and those with special educational needs
 - teaching engages students' interests and helps them to develop a love of learning.
- Raise attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 by ensuring that teachers:
 - promote reading for understanding effectively
 - encourage pupils, especially boys, to use punctuation and grammar correctly and spell accurately
 - have pupils practise their skills in writing longer pieces more frequently
 - help students to develop and apply a broader range of mathematical skills when encountering complex problems.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The calm, caring and purposeful authority of the Principal is steadily transforming this school. With the support of a talented leadership team and a highly motivated staff, she has ensured that the academy is improving strongly. Specific actions have been taken to improve the leadership and management of the sixth form.
- The Principal and senior leadership team have led the checking of teaching and learning very effectively. This has successfully developed the skills of teachers who have joined the staff and resulted in a marked improvement in teaching and achievement at various stages in the students' time at the academy. For example, learning is now good in the Nursery, Reception and in GCSE English, mathematics and science.
- Under the skilled guidance and support of senior leaders, subject and other leaders are making an ever-increasing contribution to the successful management of the academy. Practices securing good outcomes in English and mathematics at GCSE are being shared with leaders in the primary phase to raise standards of literacy and numeracy. New subject leaders in history, geography and modern foreign languages are raising current students' attainment through actions linked to more effective checks on students' progress.
- A wide range of subjects and activities are offered to students at all stages of their school career. This offer is under constant review and updated in response to the changing needs of current students. The school day has been extended as part of the academy's commitment to extending school provision and supporting students to succeed. Additional teaching supports literacy and numeracy for those who require it and the most able students are now given the chance to extend their learning appropriately. Many students are involved in sports, drama and music, building their confidence and self-esteem alongside improving their skills.
- Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is promoted effectively. This is now integrated into lessons and is a significant part of the school. Students learn to respect and appreciate differences, treat others with respect and understand different points of view. The school helps prepare students well for life in modern Britain.
- The academy promotes equal opportunities well, benefitting from the contacts and schools both within and beyond the United Learning. This results in no discrimination and helps students to show respect for others and to take pride in their work and the academy.
- Independent and impartial advice on careers, training, sixth form and further education is available to all students. The academy is determined to raise the aspirations of its students and broaden their horizons, so significant partnerships play a key role in this endeavour. Links with national football clubs have led to many students benefitting from coaching, fitness and leadership training. Strong ties with other providers, including @Futsal and Marlborough College and regional universities, have contributed positively.
- Leaders have been effective in using the additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils to rapidly close the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils this year.
- The primary sports funding is used well. Students enjoy taking part in a rich and wide range of sporting activities. The physical education team from the secondary phase provide other teachers with high-quality training and help pupils in the primary phase to successfully learn new skills.
- United Learning provides very effective and highly valued support to promote and accelerate the academy's development. Directors are frequent visitors to the academy to offer help and guidance and to set leaders a demanding set of expectations to ensure the academy improves at pace.
- Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Effective governance is provided by the sponsor, United Learning, with overall responsibility for the performance of the academy. The local governing body holds leaders to account well for the quality of teaching and safeguarding.
 - Members of both bodies make good use of school and national achievement information to ensure they know the academy's strengths and areas for development. They have rightly identified the need to enhance the basic skills of learners and for increased challenge for the most able students as areas for development. They are also knowledgeable about the quality of teaching across the different phases.
 - Governors understand the link between pay progression and student achievement. Inadequate teaching is not tolerated and only good or better teaching is rewarded.
 - The local governing body manage the academy's finances effectively and know how well the pupil premium is helping eligible students to achieve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students conduct themselves around the school well. The academy provides a calm and orderly environment in which students learn and play together productively.
- Students are keen to celebrate the increasing success of their academy. They wear their uniform with pride. Books are well cared for and presentation of work is of a high quality. There is little evidence of litter or graffiti around either site.
- Students are polite, welcoming and friendly. They spontaneously hold doors open for each other and adults. They use good manners without being reminded. Adults have high expectations of all within the academy and the systems of rewards based on values such as respect, kindness and excellence motivate students to develop an awareness of their own good behaviours.
- In lessons, students are attentive and keen to learn new things. Occasionally, the levels of pupils' interest and enthusiasm falls because they are not motivated enough by the tasks asked of them. Despite this, their conduct remains good.
- A small number of students display challenging behaviour from time to time. School records show that such behaviour is dealt with swiftly and appropriately. Effective strategies are in place to help these students make good choices about their behaviours. Students, staff and parents agree that behaviour has improved well over time and incidents of poor behaviour have significantly reduced.
- Students are proud of the contributions that they make to the life of the school either as school councillors or as representatives of the school in their teams. Students have been very influential in the shaping of the design of the new outdoor activity space. Their plans will be acted upon this year.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students are confident that the school keeps them safe. The majority of parents hold the same view as their children.
- Students have a good understanding about how to reduce the risk to themselves in a range of situations both within and beyond the school, including the safe use of the internet.
- Students know about bullying and the different forms that bullying can take. They say that bullying still occurs but is much less common than in the past. However, they are confident that members of staff will listen and deal quickly with incidents that arise. School records confirm this.
- School leaders have been thorough in ensuring students and parents understand the importance of attending school regularly. Overall attendance is now above the national average, reflecting students' enjoyment of school.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is improving but is not consistently at least good across the academy. This is leading to variable rates of progress.
- The most able students are not routinely provided with activities that challenge or deepen their thinking. Some students told inspectors that sometimes their work is too easy.
- Teachers do not consistently plan activities that meet the specific learning needs of disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Sometimes these students are set the same work as their classmates. Even with close support, this can mean that they struggle with work that is too hard for them.
- Pupils have not been sufficiently encouraged to use punctuation and grammar correctly or spell accurately. Writing activities are becoming increasingly effective in motivating boys and girls as opportunities for students to practise their skills in writing longer pieces are now more common. The impact of this is beginning to be seen in the work of pupils currently in the school.
- The teaching of reading is better than in the past. Reading activities are increasingly well planned to ensure a greater focus on helping students develop a range of reading skills. Reading for understanding is not always secure. However, more pupils now read with expression and use their knowledge of phonics (the sounds that letters make) to confidently read unfamiliar words.
- Teaching has not focused sharply enough on developing pupils' mathematical skills. This has left gaps in pupils' understanding. The situation is improving and teachers are now helping pupils to learn a broad range of mathematical skills. Teachers are also starting to give pupils more chances to deepen and apply their mathematical thinking skills through more complex problems.
- Teachers clearly insist on high-quality presentation and, as a result, students take pride in producing neat work. The presentation of work is of a consistently high standard and is still improving.
- Teachers regularly mark students' work. Teachers' comments tell students exactly what they need to do to

improve their work. Consequently, students know how to correct their errors. Most teachers clearly check the students' responses to ensure they have good knowledge and understanding of the work done.

- Where students make good progress, teachers use questions well to probe and check students' thinking and understanding. They also make suitable changes to the planned activities during the lesson so that students learn as much as possible.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good. Teachers encourage students of all ages to ask each other questions and to work together well during paired and group activities.
- Teaching assistants are carefully deployed and are skilled in supporting and challenging the less able groups.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The results of the Year 6 national tests showed that, from their average starting points at the end of Key Stage 1, the majority of pupils, including the disadvantaged, the disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, did not make the progress expected of them. This was because of previous weaknesses in teaching.
- In 2014, while pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 rose, it remained well below the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- By the end of Year 6, the most able pupils do not reach the levels they are capable of, especially in mathematics.
- In 2014, disadvantaged pupils made better progress in reading, writing and mathematics than they had in 2013. Nevertheless, disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 left the school with attainment that was almost one term behind their classmates both in school and when compared to other pupils nationally in each of these subjects.
- Pupils in all year groups, including disadvantaged pupils, are now making better progress in all aspects of their learning across Years 2 to 6. Inspection evidence shows that a greater proportion of pupils in the different groups within the primary phase of the school are making the progress expected of them.
- Actions taken to ensure activities engage boys and girls are having a beneficial impact. Nevertheless, boys still do less well than girls in writing and in their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling by the end of Year 6.
- Unvalidated examination results for 2014 indicate that attainment at the key measure of five GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, are rising but remains below the national average.
- In the past, students have underachieved in history, geography and modern foreign languages. School data and a review of work books show that current students are making better progress and securing levels of attainment closer to and better than might be expected of them.
- From significantly low starting points, students make good progress in English, mathematics and science compared to other students nationally. The school has good provision across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 for those students entering the school with low attainment in English and mathematics. Consequently, most make at least expected progress, with many making accelerated progress, which helps them catch up with other students.
- Analysis of the 2014 examination results shows that gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged students and their peers in the school remained too wide. Disadvantaged students attained around one and a half grades less than their peers both in school and compared to other students nationally in English and in mathematics. The school's extensive efforts to ensure disadvantaged students receive the additional support they need have increased these students' rates of progress and are leading to these gaps narrowing rapidly.
- Few students enter the secondary phase of the academy with high levels of attainment in English or mathematics at Key Stage 2. Those that do usually make similar progress to high-attaining students nationally.
- Good support is beginning to accelerate the progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs. However, as with other students in the academy, their progress and achievement require improvement.
- Attainment on entry to the academy is well below that expected for their age. Students' progress through the academy is variable so that attainment remains below the national average when many complete their GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11.

The early years provision

is good

- Children start the Nursery with skills and experiences well below levels typically seen for their age. A growing number have skill levels well below those normally seen in language and social development,
- Children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes, although their attainment in reading, writing and number work is still only close to national expectations by the time they enter Year 1.
- Good teaching in the early years is enabling children to make increasingly rapid progress. Children are provided with many stimulating and exciting learning opportunities in and outside the classroom. Their intense curiosity and desire to gain greater knowledge are constantly encouraged.
- Teachers and their teaching assistants work very effectively in their teams. Their accurate assessment of children's progress and its use in planning is enabling children to catch up quickly in their social and emotional development.
- Children in all classes in Nursery and Reception learn rapidly how to share and how to help each other. They learn to follow instructions carefully. Their behaviour is good. They gain confidence and learn how to make choices, and work and play together.
- Leadership of the early years is good. Leaders consistently encourage good learning and social habits, resulting in children making good progress in most aspects of their development.
- All staff work effectively with parents. Parents are encouraged into the academy to talk with staff and are helped to discover ways to better support their own children's development.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Students' achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. Students arrive in Year 12 with results in previous examinations that are below the national average. In the past two years, results have been too varied, and too many students leave attaining results that are below the national average. Current tracking information provided by the academy shows that achievement is improving.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form require improvement. The school leadership has taken action to do this. The newly appointed directors of sixth form have introduced more accurate and rigorous systems to track students' progress. Procedures now use the findings to inform more effective planning and are having a positive effect on attainment, but it is still too early to see the impact on overall achievement.
- Leaders rigorously check the progress, attendance and behaviour of students attending the @Futsal programmes. Outcomes are positive and students' attainment is now close to the national average because of the effective support provided and the constructive systems of rewards employed by the academy.
- Recent changes to the sixth form curriculum have seen subject choice more strongly linked to better meet both the interests and abilities of students. Students increasingly follow courses that suit their ambitions and prepare them well for employment or for higher education.
- The behaviour and attitudes to learning of students in the sixth form match those in the rest of the academy and are good. The school's work to keep students safe is similarly so; students say they feel safe, secure and well cared for. The quality of learning and the achievements made by students over time is also in line with that of other students in the academy and requires improvement. This is because not all students are making good progress in their learning given their starting points.
- Students understand well the issues relating to discrimination. They receive support and guidance through assemblies and during tutor time to help them prepare for life and work in modern Britain. They receive helpful and unbiased advice to help them shape their own futures.

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	135364
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	455979

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,776
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	500
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sir Anthony Greener
Principal	Ruth Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 January 2013
Telephone number	01793 426900
Fax number	01793 426901
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