

# The Discovery Academy

Discovery Drive, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 0GA

## Inspection dates

14–15 January 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that has serious weaknesses.

- Achievement in English and mathematics is inadequate. Too few students make the progress they should and, as a result, not enough students gain five GCSEs graded C or above including English and mathematics.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs do not make the progress they should.
- In 2014 the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students supported by additional government funding and their classmates has widened.
- The most able students are not doing as well as they should because teaching is not challenging enough.
- Teaching is inadequate. The quality of teaching over time has led to students not making enough progress. There have been recent improvements.
- Teaching has not tackled the significant weaknesses in students' basic numeracy skills.
- Students' progress in mathematics is not improving quickly enough.
- The number of students who are absent from school for long periods is well above the national average. This means they have fewer opportunities to learn.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students who are not allowed to go to school for a short period because of poor behaviour is too high.
- Some leaders of subjects are ineffective at improving the achievement of all groups of students.

### The school has the following strengths

- The Executive Principal and his senior team work tirelessly for the students. As a result, teaching and behaviour are improving.
- Academy leaders know what the issues are for the academy. They quickly established strong systems to monitor the academy's performance and rigorously check the quality of teaching. They effectively use training to improve the performance of teachers.
- Academy leaders have rapidly improved the students' behaviour and attitudes towards learning. Students work hard in lessons and support each other. The academy is a calm and orderly community.
- Academy staff work hard to uphold the academy's expectations.
- Students told inspectors that the academy is rapidly improving. Students say they get good support with any problems and that they feel safe. Academy leaders have ensured there is a range of courses which effectively meet the needs of those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- Governors are highly professional and skilled in holding academy leaders to account. They rigorously check how well the academy is doing.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students’ learning and behaviour in 41 classrooms. Senior leaders joined inspectors on a number of these visits. Inspectors also observed an assembly, break times and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors scrutinised students’ books and folders during lessons and as a separate activity.
- Meetings were held with groups of students.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Executive Principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body, who represents the academy’s sponsor, and two other governors. One inspector visited the Kinetic Academy, which provides alternative provision.
- There were 22 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire to provide evidence for the inspection. Inspectors also considered the 103 responses to Ofsted’s staff questionnaires.
- Inspectors analysed a variety of information about students’ progress, attendance and behaviour. They looked at a range of documentation including the school’s self-evaluation and development plans and minutes from the governing body meetings. The inspection team looked at the school’s safeguarding policies and at its records relating to the safeguarding of students.

## Inspection team

Mark Capel, Lead inspector	Associate Inspector
Judith Tolley	Additional Inspector
Tim Long	Additional Inspector
Pamela Hemphill	Additional Inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.*

### Information about this school

- The academy is a larger than the average secondary school. It is part of the College Academies Trust, which is sponsored by Stoke-on-Trent College.
- The academy opened in September 2011 following the merger of two predecessor secondary schools. It moved into new purpose-built accommodation in September 2013.
- The principal took up his post in September 2013. The vice principal joined the academy in January 2014 and an assistant principal joined in September 2014.
- Over 80% of the students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average. The majority of students from these minority ethnic groups are of Pakistani heritage.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, who are supported through the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government for students known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority), is almost double the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is above the national average.
- There are currently 35 students who attend a range of alternative or off-site provision managed by the Stoke-on-Trent Secondary Heads Group (SASCAL). The Executive Principal is currently the chair of the Alternative Provision board set up by SASCAL.
- In 2014 the academy failed to meet the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 4.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in order to raise standards in English and mathematics and speed up the progress of all groups of students, especially disadvantaged students, the most able students and those with special educational needs, by making sure that:
  - all teachers use every opportunity to support students to develop their basic literacy skills in lessons
  - teachers frequently check students' progress in mathematics and accurately identify gaps in their knowledge, understanding and skills so that they can plan targeted activities which will help students to move forward more quickly
  - teachers increase the level of challenge in lessons for all students, especially the most able, by helping students to explore what they are learning in greater detail, so that they can deepen their knowledge and understanding and develop their subject skills
  - all teachers accurately assess students' work so that students know what they have to do to catch up or move forward with their learning more quickly
  - all students know how to respond effectively to subject specific feedback so that it helps to improve their learning.
- Develop regular opportunities for students to practise and apply their numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics.
- Reduce the persistent absence of students to at least the overall national average by making sure that:
  - students, parents and the local community become more aware of the direct link between good levels of attendance and achieving well
  - all staff take responsibility for promoting good attendance and ensure that students catch up on the learning they miss when they are away from school.

- Reduce exclusion rates for disadvantaged students to at least the overall national average by making sure that effective systems to manage and improve the behaviour of those students who do not conform to the academy's expectations are consistently implemented.
  
- Improve leadership and management so that all actions drive improvements in students' achievement by:
  - supporting and challenging middle leaders, particularly in mathematics, to speed up the progress made by all groups of students
  - making sure that all teachers precisely target their support for students who are falling behind in their achievement
  - making sure that the spending of the pupil premium funding has a direct impact on the achievement, behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged students.

An external review of the academy's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management requires improvement

- In the last 12 months the Executive Principal and his senior team have improved teaching and accelerated the progress of students. There is a new vision and ambition for the future which focuses strongly on students' progress from entry to the academy in Year 7. This vision is now being realised by the progress made by students currently in the academy but has not yet translated into good outcomes for students by the end of Year 11.
- Academy leaders have taken action to make significant changes which are now beginning to bear fruit. They have reorganised the structure of the school day to provide effective blocks of teaching time which meet the needs of the students. Students, especially those who have special educational needs, told inspectors that the new arrangements made it easier to learn. The curriculum now offers more opportunities for students to study the English Baccalaureate (EBACC) subjects (achieving a GCSE grade C or above in English, mathematics, a language, history or geography and two sciences). A year group system with heads of year has been implemented to make sure that the attendance, behaviour and progress of all groups of students is effectively tracked and monitored. These are major changes made in a short space of time and have taken time to start to become effective.
- Work to improve the quality of teaching is rigorous and systematic and the impact on the quality of teaching has been rapid. Academy leaders now take into account students' progress over time in judging the quality of teaching. The academy organises regular training for staff in response to findings from lesson observations and checking students' work. Teachers, including newly qualified teachers, appreciate the guidance they receive from academy staff. The academy's information shows that this is leading to improved progress in many subjects, particularly English.
- Teaching is also improving because of the robust ways in which teachers' performance is checked. Any underperformance is rigorously challenged and there is a clear link between the impact teachers and leaders have and pay increases.
- Students are set challenging targets and their progress towards these is tracked in forensic detail by senior leaders, heads of subject and heads of year. When students are not making the progress they should, leaders intervene quickly to provide a range of additional support. The impact of this can be seen in improving achievement, better attitudes towards learning and improving attendance. However, some teachers rely too heavily on senior leaders to lead these interventions.
- Academy leaders have an accurate view of the academy's strengths and correctly identify where further improvements are needed. The academy makes effective use of additional support from partners in the Colleges Academy Trust and the reports by independent school improvement partners. As a result school leaders have an improvement plan which is clearly focused on raising students' achievement by raising expectations, developing high-quality teaching and improving students' learning skills. However, they do not clearly identify how initiatives will be reviewed and evaluated so that lessons can be learned and plans refined.
- Spending of the pupil premium funding has not been effective in improving the achievement of disadvantaged students. Academy leaders now have a clear spending plan for pupil premium funding which is linked to specific targets to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students. However, the plan is more focused on improving disadvantaged students' reading and literacy skills and is not clear how these students' basic numeracy skills will be developed.
- Leaders of subjects are held rigorously to account for the students' performance in their subject areas and this is securing improvements in a range of subjects. The skills and expertise of subject and year group leaders are developing well but are not yet consistent in their effectiveness, particularly in mathematics.
- Academy leaders have reviewed the curriculum and ensured that the range of subjects is broad and balanced. The academy ensures equal opportunities for all students so they study for qualifications suitable to their needs. It supports individual students in following an appropriate and relevant curriculum. The personal, social, health, economic and citizenship education curriculum is well planned across a daily 30 minute tutorial session, subject lessons and a school assembly programme. It successfully fosters good relations and makes sure that any discrimination is robustly tackled. This, together with the school ethos which strongly promotes tolerance, respect and understanding of democracy, means that students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The academy provides students with effective information, advice and guidance on the subjects they choose to study in Years 9, 10 and 11 and in preparation for what they will do beyond Year 11. Careers advisors are available in school for all students and offer a service to meet the needs of each student. There are regular careers events in the academy which are linked to parents' evenings. Academy leaders have been very successful in making sure that 99% of students who recently left the academy have

continued in education or training or found employment.

- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding students meet requirements. Academy leaders take swift and appropriate action to secure the safety and welfare of the students. They check that other agencies are doing everything they can to help potentially vulnerable students or those who need additional support.
- Academy leaders are rigorous in making checks on the students who attend courses away from the school. They make sure these students are safe and making good progress in developing their work-related skills. Robust systems are in place to make sure these placements are the most suitable for those students.
- The College Academies Trust has provided appropriate advice and guidance to support academy improvement.

#### ■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have a strong strategic vision for the academy as part of the Colleges Academy Trust. They have a clear understanding of their role and bring a good range of high-level skills and expertise to the academy. They undertake regular training to ensure they are best able to fulfil their role.
- Governors regularly visit the academy. They contribute their considerable expertise to appropriate areas and hold leaders rigorously to account. They meet with leaders from all levels and each area of the school regularly to review the progress being made in various aspects of the academy's work. However, they have been less effective in making sure that the academy's spending of pupil premium funding has made a positive difference to the achievement of disadvantaged students.
- They are confident in analysing the considerable amount of information provided by the academy. As a result they have a good understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses including the quality of teaching and how the progress of students compares to national averages.
- Governors understand how the school uses performance management to improve teaching. They have supported school leaders in challenging underperformance.
- Members of the governing body are efficient in ensuring that statutory duties are met, especially with regard to safeguarding.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils

### requires improvement

#### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because the number of students who are absent from school for long periods is well above the national average. This means there are too many students missing opportunities to learn.
- The majority of students have good attitudes to learning. They arrive at the academy on time, go to their lessons promptly and quickly settle into their work. They willingly follow clear routines in lessons, listen to staff and try their best to succeed. Students cooperate with each other and support each other with their learning.
- Students are polite and helpful. They behave sensibly so that breaks and lunchtimes are calm and orderly. Students from different backgrounds get on well with each other. Students in Year 7, who have only been at the academy for one term, say they feel settled and are glad they have chosen to come to the academy.
- Good attitudes are promoted in the school through a well understood system of praise and rewards which are valued by the students.
- Students willingly contribute to school life. For example, older students serve as prefects and students from all year groups sit on the school council. Students contribute to the organisation of the Christmas show and regularly participate in fundraising activities.
- Students are pleased with their new buildings and take care and pride in them. There is very little litter around the academy site.
- The overall attendance of students at the academy has improved since the last school year to become closer to the national average.
- The number of students who are not allowed to go to the academy for a short period of time because of their poor behaviour has significantly fallen. However, the proportion of disadvantaged students who are excluded for short periods because they do not conform to the academy's expectations is too high.

## Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The safety of students is afforded a high priority within the school.
- Students, including those who are potentially vulnerable, say they feel safe and secure in school. They are clear that they trust adults in the school and know who to talk to if they have a problem. Students are confident that they will be listened to by staff at the academy.
- Students know about different forms of bullying. According to students there are incidents of bullying and these are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. This was confirmed in discussions with staff and by the school records.
- The school makes sure that students have a broad understanding of how to keep themselves safe from potential harm when they are not in the academy. Issues such as keeping safe online, cyber-bullying, extremism and radicalisation are discussed in detail in assemblies, form time and lessons.
- Academy leaders robustly monitor the behaviour, attendance and safety of students attending alternative provision. An inspector's visit to an alternative provider showed that students are safe and their behaviour is good. The rigorous systems used by academy leaders to check the quality of alternative providers ensures they are the most suitable placements for these students.

## The quality of teaching

### is inadequate

- Teaching is inadequate. Due to weak teaching over time most students have not made the progress they should, particularly in English and mathematics. The majority of students enter the school with well-below average levels of skills.
- Academy leaders have ensured that teaching is improving quickly but it is not yet allowing all students to make the rapid gains needed in their learning in all subjects to make up for inadequate progress in the past.
- Until recently, teachers have not had high enough expectations of what students can and should achieve. They have not clearly understood how much progress students were making and adapted their teaching to meet the needs of students. As a result students have not done well enough.
- The quality of teaching in mathematics is inadequate because it is not enabling all students to make at least good progress from their low starting points. Teachers do not always set work which matches the needs of the students and lessons become a series of activities which are either too hard or too easy for students. Marking in mathematics is not consistent and some students' books are untidy and contain unfinished work. As a consequence, there are gaps in the students' knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Teachers do not always ensure that students practise and develop their numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics.
- Teaching, including the marking of written work is not focusing enough on developing students' literacy skills in all subjects. Teachers do not always correct errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar when marking students' work. Students are not required to produce detailed written answers often enough and this means they do not always deepen their understanding and improve their subject skills.
- The academy has an effective strategy to improve reading. As a result the reading ages of all groups of students are quickly improving.
- The new marking policy is being used consistently by most teachers who regularly provide subject specific feedback to students. However, many students do not respond to this feedback in enough detail. As a result marking and feedback is not always effective in speeding up students' progress.
- The academy has established effective systems for planning and structuring lessons supported by set routines, which students willingly follow. This means that students know what is expected of them. However, some teachers do not make sure that all students' knowledge and understanding is secure before moving on to the next level of work and this limits the progress made by some students.
- Teachers are not consistently accurate in their assessment of students' work. Sometimes they are over generous in their marking and this means that students sometimes think they are better at a subject than they really are. As a result, students do not spend enough time developing their subject knowledge and skills to fill gaps in their learning.
- The most able students are not sufficiently challenged by work that is hard enough. This limits the progress they make in lessons. Teachers do not always challenge students through effective questions and often provide students with the answers without giving them time to think. As a result students rely upon their teachers for answers and solutions instead of developing their own skills in the subject.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very positive in the vast majority of lessons. Teachers

make their subjects relevant to the students' lives. They provide good quality stimulus materials in lessons and students appreciate these efforts.

- The most effective teaching is characterised by teachers carefully planning what all students, including those who have special educational needs, can and should learn. They provide a range of teaching materials which match the different needs of groups of students. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to pose questions which challenge and engage students and, as a result, students make good progress. When asked to, students work well together.
- The school has provided additional training for all teachers and teaching assistants to ensure they effectively meet the needs of disabled students and those who have special educational needs in their classes. The recently appointed leader for special educational needs has introduced intensive strategies to improve these students' reading, spelling and handwriting skills as well as organising carefully targeted interventions in mathematics. Information provided by the academy shows that these students are now making better progress.

### The achievement of pupils

### is inadequate

- Achievement is inadequate because students do not make enough progress in English and mathematics.
- Students join the academy in Year 7 with attainment in English and mathematics which is well below average. In 2014 the proportion of students achieving five or more passes at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics fell to 37%. This is much lower than could be reasonably expected and, combined with the information on the progress students made since the last inspection, represents a fall in standards.
- In 2014 less than half of students made expected progress in English and mathematics. The academy's monitoring shows that the progress of current students is improving overall and indicated to rise further. Students' progress in English is improving quickly and this was shown in the academy's records as well as inspectors' evidence when observing learning in lessons and checking students' work books. The progress of students in mathematics is also rising but only slowly because there are some weaknesses in the quality of teaching in mathematics.
- The gap between disadvantaged students and their classmates in gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics widened in 2014. The results show that disadvantaged students attained a grade lower in English and one and a half grades lower in mathematics compared to other students in the school. The gap between the grade achieved by disadvantaged students in the school and other students nationally was one and a half grades in English and just over two grades in mathematics. Academy information shows that these gaps are narrowing for all current year groups.
- The proportion of students achieving the EBACC increased slightly to 5% in 2014. However, this is still well below the national average.
- In 2014 the achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs was much lower than could be reasonably expected. The progress of these students in English and mathematics was well below their classmates and other students nationally. The academy's monitoring shows that the current progress of these students is improving in Year 11 and improving quickly in all other year groups. This is because the academy has provided better support for these students and made sure their progress is carefully checked.
- The academy has only a small proportion of most able students. In 2014 they made less progress in English and mathematics and gained fewer higher grades in other GCSE subjects than similar students nationally. The academy is now more focused on the progress of these students but it is too soon to measure the impact of recent initiatives on their achievement.
- Students join the academy with very low literacy skills and reading ages well below their chronological age. Academy records show that, as a result of intensive literacy interventions students are quickly improving their reading ability. Students told inspectors they enjoy reading and are now more willing to read.
- Students perform well in vocational subjects. All students taking vocational subjects such as sport, applied science and business studies make good progress.
- Academy leaders have chosen not to enter students early for GCSE examinations from now on. In 2014, the policy of early entry had neither a positive or negative impact on the achievement of students, including the most able.
- The progress made by students in alternative provision is robustly monitored by the academy to make sure the placement remains the most suitable for the students. Academy records show improvements in attendance and behaviour for these students along with good progress in work-related qualifications.



## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136681
<b>Local authority</b>	Stoke-on-Trent
<b>Inspection number</b>	427113

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,078
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sarah Robinson
<b>Headteacher</b>	John Patino
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 January 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 882100
<b>Fax number</b>	Not applicable
<b>Email address</b>	info@thediscoveryacademy.co.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2014

