

Grace Academy Solihull

Chapelhouse Road, Chelmsey Wood, Birmingham, B37 5JS

Inspection dates 5–6 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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

- Standards attained by students over time have been too low and have only started to improve since the appointment of the new Principal.
- Key Stage 4, students have not made the progress expected of them, particularly in mathematics.
- The gap between disadvantaged students and others has been too wide in the past and is only now beginning to close.
- Too few of the most-able students have made the progress they should in either mathematics or English because expectations of them have not been high enough.
- For a long time, students' attendance has been below average and this has only started to improve over the last few months.
- Some teachers do not correct students' misconceptions by regularly marking their work.
- Not all teachers plan and deliver lessons that interest and challenge students well enough to ensure that they all make consistently good progress. This is particularly so in Key Stage 3.
- The poorly developed literacy and numeracy skills of some students get in the way of them learning well in a range of subjects.
- Students' attitudes to learning are not always positive. A very small minority of students do not listen to their teachers and so prevent others in their class from learning and making progress.
- Achievement in the sixth form is improving but attainment is still below average. The proportion of students who are not in education or training at the end of their time in the sixth form is above average.

The school has the following strengths

- Supported by senior leaders, the Grace Academy Trust and an experienced interim executive governing body, the Principal is demanding much higher standards.
- Standards currently being attained by pupils are improving very rapidly, as is the progress being made by Key Stage 4 students in mathematics.
- Current students in Year 11 are set to attain average outcomes in mathematics and above-average outcomes in English.
- The academy now has a rigorous system of assessment, moderation, monitoring and tracking that ensures accurate information about students' progress.
- The academy has strong partnerships with the local authority school improvement service, the academy trust and some outstanding teaching schools. These are being used to support improvements to the quality of teaching.
- Students feel safe and most of them are responding very positively to the higher expectations of their behaviour and achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 lessons taught by 35 different teachers; four of these lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with students in lessons, in meetings and during social times.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, the chief executive officer of the trust, the Chair of the Interim Executive Governing Body and senior and subject leaders. Inspectors also spoke to a group of teachers.
- Inspectors looked at safeguarding and child protection processes and examined school records to check procedures. Attendance information, records of exclusions and behaviour were also looked at.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation including: the academy's evaluation of its own performance, the academy improvement plan, minutes of meetings of the executive governing body, and the academy's own evaluation of the quality of teaching over time.
- The data from the academy's assessment, tracking and monitoring system was looked at, along with reports compiled by subject leaders analysing students' performance.
- Inspectors reviewed work in students' books and discussed the quality of marking with teachers and students.
- Inspectors took account of the 40 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 57 responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents.

Inspection team

Liz Talmadge, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Carol Worthington	Additional Inspector
Patrick Walsh	Additional Inspector
Robert Steed	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- A new Principal was appointed to lead Grace Academy Solihull from September 2014. At the same time, the academy trust removed the governing body and appointed an interim executive board of governors.
- The academy is a little smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are White British. The numbers of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average and there are very few students whose first language is not English.
- The academy receives pupil premium funding for just over half of its students. This is much more than in most other schools. This additional funding is for children looked after by the local authority or those students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The number of disabled students or those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The school has a facility called the Da Vinci Centre that supports some students through mentoring and additional teaching.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision at either Unity Positive Pathways or Triple Crown, both offering courses leading to approved GCSE and BTEC Level 2 courses.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and students' achievement by making sure that:
 - work in all lessons, but especially in Key Stage 3, is planned to include content, resources and teaching strategies that interest and engage all students
 - expectations of the most-able students are much higher in all subjects, but particularly in mathematics, so that, by the end of Key Stage 4, more students attain higher grades and make good progress
 - the teaching of literacy and numeracy skills takes place in all subjects and year groups so that all students become more confident when writing, reading, speaking and using mathematical calculations
 - the good practice evident in marking in many subjects is extended to all subjects so that it shows students what to do to improve their work.
- Improve teaching and students' achievement in the sixth form by making sure that:
 - the specialist subject knowledge of all teachers is good enough to support the good progress of students on sixth form courses
 - the advice and guidance offered to sixth form students prepares them for further education, training or employment.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management on students' progress and success by:
 - ensuring that the academy's behaviour policy is followed consistently by teachers in order to improve students' attitudes to learning and reduce disruption in lessons
 - working with the families of students who are regularly absent so that good overall attendance supports their better progress in school
 - improving the quality of careers education and guidance in order to reduce the number of students who leave school not in education, employment or training.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The new Principal has taken on the leadership of an academy that has, for a long time, had low standards of achievement, attendance and behaviour. There is clear evidence that, since his arrival in September, he has challenged those low standards and set new expectations for the whole school community. The academy is now in the process of rapid change. During this process, some staff have left the academy and others have been appointed, but existing senior leaders have welcomed the opportunities to improve outcomes for Grace Academy students.
- It is still too early for the academy to demonstrate the full impact of the changes that have been made but there is sufficient evidence of better systems and processes in place. The quality of teaching is now closely monitored, as are the standards attained by students. The academy still has further to go but inspectors saw strong evidence of successful strategies being used to bring about the improvements needed to the achievement of students and the quality of teaching.
- The new chief executive officer of the Grace Academy Trust has worked with senior leaders and the Principal to observe the teaching of all teachers. This has resulted in individual improvement plans for those teachers who do not teach consistently good lessons. With the support of a lead practitioner from Tuxford School, an outstanding teaching school, those teachers are now being supported to improve the quality of their teaching. A new system of teacher appraisal has been introduced alongside the regular monitoring of standards.
- A new assessment, monitoring, tracking and reporting system has been introduced since September 2014 and this enables the academy to be confident about the standards that students are working at. The assessments undertaken by all teachers every six weeks are externally moderated by staff from Sponne School, an outstanding teaching school. This ensures the reliability and rigour of the new assessment process. A new simplified reporting system keeps parents regularly informed of their child's progress.
- Senior leaders regularly review students' progress. Current Year 11 students are set to achieve better overall outcomes in their GCSE examinations than students who completed Year 11 in 2014. This is largely because the quality of leadership and teaching in mathematics has improved, leading to progress in mathematics that has accelerated. The improvements seen in Year 11 are also evident in Years 9 and 10, but there is more work to do to ensure that students in Years 7 and 8 make the same good progress.
- Subject leaders have welcomed the changes and the additional accountability brought about by the Principal and now undertake a detailed analysis every half term of standards in their subject areas. They match the quality of teaching to student assessment information to inform robust discussions about improvement with senior leaders.
- Attendance is still not as good as it needs to be but it is improving and fewer days are lost to persistent absence. The academy has re-established its relationship with the local authority and is now getting support for attendance through the local authority's education welfare service.
- Behaviour has improved markedly because of the decisive actions of the Principal but there are still well-founded concerns expressed by some teachers and parents that a minority of Key Stage 3 students disrupt lessons with their poor behaviour. There is a strong relationship between weaker teaching and poor behaviour. Where teaching is engaging and interesting, and teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve, students behave well.
- The curriculum is in the process of being reviewed. Key Stage 3 is currently taught across two years and senior leaders are evaluating whether this and the post-16 curriculum are effective in promoting students' progress. The current curriculum for Key Stage 3 is just starting to support students' to develop their literacy skills with increased English provision, smaller group sizes and more individual support. It is too early to judge whether this provision will equip all students with good literacy skills.

- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is well catered for through subjects in the curriculum and extra-curricular activities available to students during lunchtime and after school. There are, for example, leadership development programmes available to Year 10 girls, overseas visits, self-reliance activities for boys in Years 8 and 9, theme weeks and 'drop down days'. These are days when the normal timetable is suspended and all students in a year group engage in activities based around a theme or topic, such as the day each year that focuses on British values.
- There is independent advice and guidance available to students in the academy that enables them to make choices about the next steps in their education or training but this has not had sufficient impact on the above-average proportion of students who leave school not in education, employment or training.
- Since the arrival of the Principal, a number of important partnerships have been established designed to support the rapid improvement of the academy. The new chief executive officer from the Grace Academy Trust, the new Chair of the Interim Executive Governing Body and the Principal have all been able to secure additional support for the academy, and this has helped to bring about the rapid improvements taking place. Improvements to mathematics teaching and assessment have, for example, been supported by National Leaders in Education from Lincolnshire Teaching School, Spooone School and Tuxford Academy so that projected GCSE grades for 2015 are much higher than they have been in previous years.
- The local authority school improvement service is offering support for subject-based improvement and governance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The Grace Academy Trust removed the governing body of the academy in September 2014 and replaced it with an interim executive board of governors. This is a small, highly experienced, professional governing body led by a recently retired former headteacher. Governors are supporting the rapid changes that the academy is making. They have supported changes to staffing, and they are well informed about the quality of teaching and about the achievement of students. This has been designed to form the basis of their involvement in the new appraisal process to determine teachers' pay awards in the future.
 - The performance management of the Principal is undertaken by the academy trust but governors are engaged in the on-going review of the quality of teaching and leadership. The Chair of the Interim Executive Governing Body attended the quality assurance interviews with all subject leaders at the start of the year to establish a clear understanding of standards and the quality of middle leadership.
 - Governors fully understand why students underachieved in 2014 and they are now fully involved in the regular scrutiny of students' progress. They understand what is being done to support disadvantaged students, disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and they check on the impact that this is having. Governors know the projections for GCSE results in 2015, and the evidence for these projections is regularly scrutinised.
 - Governors have also been influential and supportive in re-establishing links with the local community of schools and the local authority.
 - The interim executive board ensures that the academy's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. This is because students' attitudes to learning vary and their behaviour in lessons is not always good. Some lessons are affected by low-level disruption because not all teachers apply the academy's behaviour policy consistently and because, in some lessons, students are not sufficiently interested in their work. The consistent management of behaviour is made more difficult by the inexperience of some temporary non-specialist teachers.
- All students spoken to said that behaviour has improved considerably since the arrival of the Principal,

and the majority of staff and parents say that behaviour in the academy is managed well.

- During social time, in the restaurant and in outside spaces, students behave well. They are courteous to each other, to the adults around them and to visitors.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good when they are fully engaged in their learning because the work that they are set is interesting and presents them with challenges at the right level. When this happens, students' attitudes have a good impact on their progress.
- Rates of exclusion have been very high in the past. When the new Principal arrived, exclusion rates did not decline immediately while he dealt with some of the historic poor behaviour. Exclusion rates are now reducing. They are still high but fewer school days are lost to exclusion as unacceptable behaviour reduces.
- The behaviour of students at the academy's two alternative provision sites is carefully monitored and reported to the academy on a regular basis. The academy has no concerns about the behaviour of those students.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe requires improvement. This is because too many students still miss too much time at school due to poor attendance. There has been an improvement in rates of attendance recently because the academy is working with families to make sure that their children are regularly in school. There is still more to do in this respect.
- Students report feeling safe in school. Of those parents who filled in the online questionnaire, most agreed that their children were safe in school.
- Students are made aware of the need for safe behaviour when using the internet and social media, and students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form speak confidently about what they know. Younger students, remember being given information about online safety but say that it is not regularly reinforced. Similarly, they remembered that homophobic and racist bullying had been discussed during anti-bullying week but say that it has not been revisited since then.
- Bullying is rare in the academy and students know what they should do if they encounter it.
- All teachers are made aware of child protection procedures on an annual basis and safeguarding is fully compliant with government expectations.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because it has not been consistently good enough to ensure good outcomes for students in many subjects, but particularly mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Teachers do not always make sure that their lessons are interesting enough to engage all students and ensure that they all make consistently good progress. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 3. When teachers provide interesting resources, enable students to work together in a variety of ways or offer interesting and thought-provoking challenges, students respond very positively.
- The most-able students are not always given work that is challenging and that helps them to make the good progress of which they are capable.
- The quality of teachers' marking of half-termly assessment pieces is detailed, helpful and in line with academy policy. Students respond positively and make the improvements that teachers suggest. In some subjects, work is also marked in between these half-termly assessments, but this is not the case in all subjects. This means that the quality of written work produced by students in some subjects goes

unchecked and students' misconceptions are not identified and corrected.

- The teaching of literacy to the weakest readers in Year 7 is good but the teaching of literacy and communication skills more generally is not yet consistent. Key Stage 3 students and some Key Stage 4 students have weaknesses in their writing skills and in their speaking skills that have not yet been tackled. This stops them making good progress in other subjects. Numeracy skills are also weak in Key Stage 3 because students' basic calculation skills are not good enough.
- Where students are making good progress, teaching is characterised by high expectations and planning for the full range of abilities in the class. In a Year 11 history lesson, for example, different levels of activity based on the same historical source were linked to students' target grades. Students were encouraged to attempt the activity above their target grade. This offered students good levels of challenge and, as a consequence, levels of engagement and interest were high.
- There is some very good practice in the academy. A Year 7 English lesson, for example, demonstrated that, because of the teacher's high levels of organisation and careful matching of expectations to students' targets, all students made good progress. In a Year 12 chemistry lesson, the teacher asked thought-provoking questions of students, and assessed students' progress throughout the lesson, helping them to evaluate their own progress.
- The support offered to disabled students and those who have special educational needs in mainstream classes and in the Da Vinci Centre ensures that they make the same progress from their starting points as other groups.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In most years, students start at the academy with average prior attainment. Students who completed Year 11 in 2013 did not achieve as well as those who finished Year 11 in the previous year, and the outcomes for 2014 were not as good as those in 2013. This is because, while English results over time have been at or above national averages, results in mathematics have remained below average.
- In 2014, results in English for those students gaining a C grade or above for GCSE were above average, while in mathematics they were well below average. In English, the gap between disadvantaged students and their peer group was three quarters of a grade. In mathematics, it was one and a half grades. The gap between disadvantaged students and students nationally was three quarters of a grade for English and a grade and a quarter for mathematics.
- The progress that students made in English was in line with that seen nationally in 2014 but the progress that they made in mathematics was much lower than in most other schools.
- The academy's most-able students who completed Year 11 in 2014 made progress in English that was in line with most schools nationally although fewer students made better than expected progress. In mathematics, the proportion of the most-able students making at least expected progress was well below average.
- Students who left the school in 2014 achieved well in science but not in humanities or modern foreign languages.
- The academy's data for current Year 11 students show a much-improved picture. Externally confirmed test and examination data show that the achievement of students in English is on track to improve further for those students making expected and good progress. In mathematics, students making expected progress will be in line with national averages although the numbers making good progress is still below average. Disadvantaged students in the current Year 11 are currently on track to do better than in previous years. Externally validated tests show that, in mathematics, the gap with their peer group is closing rapidly although in English it is expected to remain the same as other students are achieving better progress.

- Key Stage 3 students' overall achievement is improving and this is illustrated by the regular testing and assessment results. However, in mathematics, not enough is done to ensure that progress for students in Years 7 and 8 is as good as that in other year groups. Students are not yet confident in using their numeracy skills.
- Since September 2014, the funding for literacy and numeracy 'catch-up' in Year 7 has been used to design and begin to deliver a cross-curricular literacy programme so that standards of written literacy are consistent across the school. A numeracy coordinator has just been appointed and has planned improved support for students whose attainment in mathematics is below average when they join the academy. This is an improving picture, although academy leaders are aware that still not enough is done to ensure that both literacy and numeracy skills are fully developed in Key Stage 3 and are transferable across and between subjects.
- The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is improving due to the range of in-class support available to them. For the most vulnerable students, the opportunity to attend the Da Vinci Centre enables them to have appropriate support in a nurturing environment.
- Academy leaders monitor the progress of students who attend courses at other providers. Their monitoring indicates that students all making at least the progress they should.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- A complete restructuring of the leadership of the academy since September 2014 has led to new leadership for the sixth form. There are now better systems in place for assessing, tracking and monitoring students' progress so that underperformance is identified early and additional support is quickly made available.
- The sixth form meets the current interim minimum standards. Outcomes improved from 2013 to 2014 but attainment was still below the national average. Forecasts for current Year 12 and Year 13 students suggest that there will be further improvements in both the attainment and progress of these students. A high proportion of current Year 13 students are set to achieve A* to C grades in their A2 examinations but with fewer than average attaining A* to B grades. This forecast has been externally validated by the local authority and an outstanding partner school.
- The post-16 curriculum is currently being reviewed to ensure that it offers appropriate courses for all its students. Although the current range of courses includes both vocational and academic subjects, the academy is introducing a broader range of courses with the aim of improving the employability of students. Entry requirements for some courses, particularly mathematics and science, are being raised to ensure that students select sixth form courses that help them to achieve higher grades.
- The quality of advice and guidance provided to students has improved recently and, as a consequence, the numbers of students completing their courses is rising and the number of students not in education, employment or training, while high, is beginning to fall.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving and, since September 2014, has been rigorously monitored to check that students' are making good progress in their lessons.
- Sixth form students' attitudes to learning are good, The students are enthusiastic about some of the new opportunities being offered to them, such as work-related activities and opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

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	129342
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	453783

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	775
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	100
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	John Burton
Principal	Darren Gelder
Date of previous school inspection	11 September 2013
Telephone number	0121 3294600
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