

Accrington Academy

Queens Road West, Accrington, Lancashire, BB5 4FF

Inspection dates 11–12 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The Principal, senior and middle leaders and governors share high expectations and an unswerving commitment to ensure that every student achieves their goals, whatever their circumstances. The academy is improving rapidly.
- After a dip in achievement in mathematics in 2014, the academy has taken robust and effective measures to accelerate the progress of students across the school. Students are now achieving well and making rapid progress.
- Attainment overall at the end of Key Stage 4 is just below average. This represents good progress given students' well-below average starting points.
- Teaching is typically good. Leaders have taken effective action to eradicate teaching that is less than good.
- Students' behaviour around the school is good. They are proud of their school. Students' positive attitudes and excellent attendance contribute to their good achievement.
- Students enjoy the many opportunities to attend clubs, extra classes and develop leadership skills. They show a clear understanding and awareness of British values of respect and tolerance.
- The subjects taught and the enrichment opportunities available prepare students well for the future and contribute effectively to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The sixth form is going from strength to strength. Numbers are increasing and most students make very good progress, often from lower than average starting points.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching does not yet result in outstanding achievement for the majority of students. Skills in numeracy are not as strong as they are in literacy.
- Students in the sixth form from disadvantaged circumstances who are supported by additional funding did not do as well as other students nationally in 2014.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a wide range of subjects across all age groups. Some learning was observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors visited morning tutor time and an assembly.
- Inspectors held formal meetings with groups of students from each year including those in the sixth form. They spoke informally to many other students at breaks and lunchtimes and in lessons.
- Inspectors sampled work in students’ books in all year groups across a range of subjects including English, mathematics, sciences, modern languages and the humanities.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders and representatives from the governing body. A meeting was held with the Northern Director of the sponsor academy chain.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documents. These included information relating to safeguarding and child protection, attendance and behaviour, development planning, subject planning, tracking information on students’ progress, performance management systems and procedures for checking on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The views of staff were gained from the 72 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire.
- Inspectors gained the views of parents from 20 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, responses to the academy’s recent consultations with parents and from emails sent to the inspection team.

Inspection team

Judith Straw, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Peter Cox	Additional Inspector
Pamela Hemphill	Additional Inspector
Peter McKay	Additional Inspector
Alison Stott	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Accrington Academy is a larger-than-average secondary school. The sixth form opened in September 2009.
- The academy is a member of the United Learning Trust.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for support through the pupil premium is high compared to the national average and includes almost half of the entire school. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students supported through a statement of special educational needs or the new education, health and care plan is well above the national average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are both average compared to the national picture.
- The academy uses Accrington and Rossendale College, Blackburn College and The Alternative School to provide alternative courses for a very small number of students. Placements at a local authority pupil referral provision are occasionally used.
- In 2014 the school did not meet the government's current floor standards. These are 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 the quality of teaching further to enable more students to achieve exceptionally well by:
 - providing frequent opportunities for numeracy development in all subjects
 - ensuring that students are consistently challenged by questions which require answers that deepen knowledge and understanding
 - reducing the gap in achievement between disadvantaged students in the sixth form and other students nationally.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- All staff share the Principal's determination and passion to make the academy the best it can be. Staff feel proud to work at the academy and value the high-quality support and professional development they receive from senior leadership and professionals across the academy chain.
- Leaders at all levels have worked hard to improve the academy so that achievement is now good. All academy leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching because their checks are frequent and incisive. Evidence from these checks informs staff development and training. This enables leaders to securely improve teaching and effectively support staff who are new to the profession.
- Middle leaders manage their departments well. One initiative is a focus in weekly meetings on 'what do these students need to do this week to accelerate progress?' Standards and assessment are rigorously monitored to make sure that the academy has an accurate view of current achievement. Six-weekly reviews of students' books verify the evidence for progress.
- Rigorous performance management of staff ensures that only staff with a track record of success progress up the salary scales.
- Leaders have designed the programmes of study to equip students for the current labour market and to prepare them well for life after school. There is an effective programme of careers education and advice. Only a tiny minority of students do not progress to further education, training or employment.
- Pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding supports disadvantaged students academically and pastorally so that they make good progress and are able to take advantage of the numerous opportunities for enrichment offered by the academy. The progress of disadvantaged students is as good as other students in the academy at Key Stage 4. However, a gap is developing in the achievement of disadvantaged students compared to other students nationally at Key Stage 5.
- The very small number of students who attend alternative courses at other establishments are managed by a Vice-Principal who carries out frequent checks on attendance and progress in order to make sure they achieve well.
- The academy seeks innovative ways to raise aspirations for many students and improve their opportunities in life. The academy ethos is summed up as 'the best in everyone'. Examples include a programme which aims to raise aspirations for Asian and White girls, a community role-model project, mentoring programmes for students in danger of becoming disaffected, drama and music performances. Students run and present their own 'News at Nine' broadcast each week to highlight success. Gifted and talented students belong to 'Emerge', a group which aims to lift aspirations for university.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, as well as their understanding of British values, is developed very effectively through all subjects taught. In addition, participation in events such as the community working party with local Imams, the Mayor and local councillors to promote community values, young crime-stoppers, World War 1 Accrington Pals day, St George's day celebrations and Holocaust memorial day all help to widen horizons. The academy has many international links with countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Turkey and Spain. Students participate in overseas trips through the Erasmus project and learn more about their own society through the national citizenship programme.
- Good relations are fostered well and discrimination is tackled effectively so that all students have an equal opportunity.
- Parents' views of the academy are very positive. Parents' emails affirm their strong belief that staff contribute powerfully to the success and happiness of their children.
- Safeguarding arrangements go beyond statutory requirements and are exemplary. All staff follow the academy's procedures diligently. Any student at risk of harm is identified swiftly and supported.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors lead the vision for the academy that every student will achieve beyond expectations. Their aim is to raise aspirations not just in school but in the wider community. They are passionate about equal opportunities and acceptance of difference and ensure that spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is threaded throughout the school. Governors have the necessary expertise to measure the academy's success locally and nationally. They accept that there is more to do to raise achievement but point to successes already achieved. These include massively improving attendance to well-above average and the establishment of a successful sixth form, which is providing opportunities for a large number of students who might otherwise have left education at 16. They know how effective teaching is and oversee the entire performance management system including rewards for good teaching and action to address any underperformance. They have backed the academy financially in supporting the mathematics department by recruiting additional staff and offer support to local feeder primary schools

in a drive to improve standards of literacy and numeracy. Governors keep a firm check on students in receipt of pupil premium funding through progress reports every half term. The academy's finances are managed by a qualified accountant. The academy works very effectively with the academy chain to maintain a healthy budget and provide highly effective professional development. Their track record indicates a strong capacity for further improvement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students' attitudes to learning are positive. Students want to do well at the academy. They respond confidently to teachers' questioning, although sometimes this is not always challenging enough. Many students take pride in their work and their books are well presented. Saturday sessions for revision or extra tuition are well attended.
- Behaviour in most lessons is good. Only occasionally is learning disrupted by less than good behaviour and when this happens it is dealt with effectively by staff.
- Students keenly take part in a variety of leadership roles such as college councils, academy ambassadors and membership of the sixth-form executive team. Students regularly plan and take assemblies and undertake charity fundraising activities. Academic leadership opportunities include becoming 'i-genius' experts or 'lead learners'.
- Students move around the academy's site purposefully and are punctual to lessons. Younger students sometimes feel a little overwhelmed at lunchtimes when so many students are using the same facilities but agree that staff quickly deal with any issues.
- Students and staff respect each other. Students offer friendly greetings, often hold doors open and stand aside to allow others through first.
- Students stated that bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively by the school. Racist and homophobic name-calling is rare and is dealt with effectively. They say that they can talk to staff openly about any concerns they might have. All students talk positively about tolerance and valuing others.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- Safeguarding is given the highest priority. Procedures are rigorous and go beyond statutory requirements. The academy is proactive in seeking ways to widen the scope and quality of its work and to anticipate every possible hazard.
- Students understand how to keep themselves safe and are aware of situations where they may be at risk or encouraged to take part in risky behaviour. Students can identify and explain the dangers associated with using the internet and social media.
- Students' attendance is excellent and has been well-above national figures for three years. The number of students at risk of exclusion is very small. The academy works very effectively with a wide range of outside agencies to ensure that students receive the care and support they need.

The quality of teaching is good

- Evidence from the work in students' books, academy progress tracking data and from observing students' learning shows that teaching is good across the school.
- Teachers make good use of assessment data to help students learn. They plan lessons that are well matched to different abilities. Teachers set high expectations for what can be achieved and expect students to do their best.
- Just occasionally, questioning is not sufficiently challenging to make students think deeply enough, probe their reasoning and ensure that their understanding is secure.
- Teachers have good and sometimes excellent subject knowledge so that lessons are made interesting and enjoyable. They develop students' understanding of technical vocabulary effectively and in Key Stage 4 provide opportunities for students to develop important examination technique. After trial GCSE examinations students receive bespoke, detailed feedback on what they need to do to improve their grades and secure an even higher level.
- Teaching assistants are deployed well to support the learning of disabled students and those who have

special educational needs. They work in partnership with subject teachers and provide encouragement, as well as making sure students understand what they have to do and have the confidence to do it.

- In class teachers make good use of a range of technology, for example, tablet computers, to improve students' writing skills and research.
- The teaching of mathematics and English is good. The academy ensures students with weaker reading skills are supported to improve through reading and writing interventions that are put in place promptly when they join in Year 7. The teaching of mathematics has improved rapidly in the current year and is now good.
- Students have plenty of opportunities to practise and improve literacy across other subjects such as science, history and religious education. There are some examples of the development of numeracy in other subjects. For example, students in English were working out how long £150 would last in supporting a homeless person on the streets of London, as part of their study of the book '*Stone Cold*'. However, across other subjects there are not enough opportunities for numeracy development.
- Marking across the school is thorough, and helpful. Teachers provide good advice on how students can improve their work and reach the next level. Often students respond with their own comments and repeat or improve their work. High-quality marking was seen, particularly in English and religious education. It is not consistently quite as good across other subjects.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the academy in Year 7 with standards that are well-below average. Students who took GCSE examinations in 2014 came into the school with well-below average standards and, according to published data, standards were still well below at the end of Year 11. However, this data is based on their first entry to GCSE examinations and masks the fact that the proportion of students who gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics rose from 35% to 47% when examinations were retaken.
- The academy has a sound rationale for entering students early for GCSE based on a desire to ensure the best possible outcomes and ensuring future progression. This does not appear to be limiting the potential of the most able students. However, the school recognises that the practice needs to be constantly reviewed to make sure it best meets the needs of individual students and allows the academy's achievements to be fully recognised. In the current year only students in danger of not completing their course will be entered for GCSE examinations early.
- Published data for 2014 shows that achievement in that year required improvement. However, the data is again based on first entry to GCSE examinations and this improved with students' best entry results. Some of the underachievement was the result of staffing turbulence, which has now been addressed. Over time the academy can show an upward trend of improvement, which is accelerating rapidly in the current year.
- The most able students make good progress in all subjects. They are able to follow three separate sciences and two modern languages if they wish. New GCSE subjects in law and psychology are available to cater for the most able students.
- Progress in English has been stronger than progress in mathematics but progress in mathematics is fast improving. The academy has taken effective steps to address this through its approach to mathematics. The academy has convincing evidence to show that progress both in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 has increased rapidly. Inspectors' observations in English and mathematics and science confirmed that the majority of students are now making at least good progress in these subjects.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are making good progress this year in line with other students, although their attainment at the end of Year 11 is lower.
- Pupil premium funding supports initiatives that make a good contribution to the progress of disadvantaged students. In Year 11 in 2014, the attainment of disadvantaged students and others in school was one third of a grade behind in English and mathematics. The gap in attainment between disadvantaged students and others nationally is half a grade in English and one and a half grades in mathematics. Over the last three years this gap at the end of Year 11 has narrowed. Disadvantaged students made good progress in 2014.
- The small number of students who attend alternative courses make good progress. Their attendance and achievement is checked on a regular basis and at least weekly by a Vice Principal.

The sixth form provision**is good**

- Achievement in the sixth form is good as a result of good teaching and the highly positive attitudes of students. In 2014 attainment was average at both A level and AS level. All students make better than average progress in relation to their individual starting points. The work in students' folders shows that this good progress is continuing.
- In 2014 disadvantaged students made at least as good, and often better, progress than others in the academy. However, as numbers have grown, even though disadvantaged students continue to make good progress, a gap is developing in their achievement and that of others nationally.
- Students who join the sixth form from elsewhere comment on how welcome they feel and how quickly they settle in and begin to make good progress.
- The sixth form offers a good balance of academic and vocational qualifications to suit different abilities and talents. Last year 70% of students continued their education to university.
- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers use their strong knowledge of subjects and enthusiasm to engage students fully in their learning.
- The sixth form meets the requirements for age 16 to 18 study and equips students well for life after school. The few students who enter the sixth form without at least a grade C at GCSE in English or mathematics are given good support to enable them to do well in their retake examinations.
- Sixth formers have a high profile around the school and provide excellent role models for younger students. Their positive attitude to learning and mature behaviour set the tone for the rest of the school. Their attendance is good. Students greatly contribute to supporting the school's activities by working alongside younger students as peer mentors and counsellors and sometimes as classroom assistants.
- Students feel safe in the sixth form and regard their time in the academy as a positive experience. They feel stretched academically and well prepared for the future. They feel safe and have an accurate awareness of extremism and other potential negative influences.
- Leadership of the sixth form is of high quality. The head of sixth form and his colleagues care deeply for their students both academically and pastorally. Monitoring and tracking systems check students' progress and additional support is provided for any who fall behind with their work. The quality of careers guidance and information is good. The vast majority of students complete their courses and go on to further study at universities or into employment.

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	135649
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	453386

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,104
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lillian Croston
Principal	Andrew O'Brien
Date of previous school inspection	11 May 2011
Telephone number	01254 304300
Fax number	01254 304303
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