

Vandyke Upper School and Community College

Vandyke Road, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 3DY

Inspection dates 10–11 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	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 effective leadership of the headteacher and his senior team has brought about steady improvement since the last inspection.
- Students achieve well in a wide range of subjects at Key Stage 4.
- The overall progress that different groups of students make between their starting points when they enter the academy in Year 9 and the end of Key Stage 4 is good and accelerating.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress and achieve well.
- A clear focus on the quality of teaching by leaders and governors has ensured that teaching is good and improving.
- Teachers provide effective feedback which helps students understand how to improve their work.
- Students are very proud of their academy. They behave well and display highly constructive attitudes to their learning.
- Students feel safe at the academy and they learn how to keep themselves safe.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of students who make greater than expected progress is not higher than average.
- Students who are capable of achieving more than expected progress are not always pushed to do so.
- The agreed academy approach to improving literacy is not applied with equal thoroughness in every subject.
- Teaching assistants are not always deployed as effectively as they could be in every class.
- Attendance is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 43 lessons. Eight of these were observed jointly with a member of the academy’s senior leadership team. Tutorial sessions and an assembly were also observed.
- Inspectors observed students’ behaviour at breaks, lunchtimes and before school.
- Inspectors took account of the 146 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, and responses to an inspection questionnaire from 72 members of staff.
- Inspectors scrutinised the academy’s current assessment data, the academy development plan, students’ work, minutes of meetings, policies, safeguarding documentation and the academy’s self-evaluation summary.
- Inspectors met with senior, subject and other leaders, governors, teachers, and students from all year groups. They also undertook telephone discussions with a representative from the local authority and the academy’s School Improvement Partner.

Inspection team

Paul Lawrence, Lead inspector	Seconded Inspector
Alan Gray	Additional Inspector
Sarah Roscoe	Additional Inspector
Laura Henshaw	Additional Inspector

Paul Lawrence is appointed as an Additional Inspector, under the powers relating to additional inspectors, in paragraph 11 of Part 2 of Schedule 12 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Full report

Information about this school

- Vandyke Upper School and Community College is an average-sized secondary school.
- A large majority of students come from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for looked-after children and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is broadly average.
- The academy does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching to outstanding and raise achievement by:
 - identifying students who are capable of making greater than expected progress and checking that they are making the progress they should
 - providing work which allows all students to reach the highest standards of which they are capable
 - ensuring that the agreed academy approach to improving literacy is applied consistently across all subjects
 - deploying teaching assistants more effectively when they work with individuals and groups of students.
- Improve levels of attendance so they are above average by reducing the rate of persistent absence.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Academy leaders and governors have responded effectively to the issues raised at the last inspection. As a result, they have successfully improved the standard of teaching and achievement at the academy so both are now good.
- The collaborative and caring leadership of the headteacher and his senior team has created a positive ethos which is shared by all members of the academy community. The strength of senior leadership is recognised overwhelmingly by students, parents and staff alike.
- Self-evaluation at the academy is strong. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the academy's strengths and what needs to be done to make it even better. Academy development plans create a coherent approach to improving outcomes for students.
- Academy leaders establish clear expectations for the learning behaviour and conduct of students. These help shape the students' positive behaviour and attitudes and make the academy a calm and orderly place to learn.
- Academy leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching is robust. They are aware where teaching in the academy is most effective and where further support and training needs to be put in place. Performance management has been used effectively to challenge underperformance.
- Subject and other leaders make a positive impact on student progress. They are well supported by senior leaders who value them as an increasingly important source of innovative ideas for the development of the academy.
- Additional funding has been used effectively to support the achievement of disadvantaged students. Partnership work with feeder middle schools, additional communication skills classes to support literacy in Year 9 and individual mentoring programmes have all contributed to the accelerating progress of the disadvantaged students who are currently at the academy.
- The academy promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education effectively. This is achieved not only in lessons but through the participation of a large proportion of students in a varied programme of extra-curricular opportunities, including music, dance, drama and sport. Students enthusiastically engage in fundraising to support the academy's longstanding partnership with a charity in Malawi.
- Students are well prepared for life in modern Britain. All students follow a programme of life skills classes which includes units exploring different cultures and religions, and the nature of democratic government. Respect for diversity is a recurring theme in assemblies and tutorial discussion. This strengthens the academy's effective work to promote equality, foster good relations and tackle discrimination.
- High-quality advice and guidance are provided whenever students are considering future course or career choices. During Year 9, students are offered appropriate guidance about potential Key Stage 4 courses; during Key Stage 4, students receive effective guidance that helps them to make a successful transition to the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- The academy has continued to work constructively with the local authority, which has helped the academy by providing an external evaluation of standards of achievement and teaching and through the delivery of staff training.
- Academy leaders have established effective systems for identifying and monitoring students who are not making the progress they should, so appropriate support can be put in place. They have not focused so effectively on identifying students who are capable of making better-than-expected progress.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors have used their expertise and experience effectively to support the academy's recent improvement. They have asked challenging questions of the academy's leadership at key times, and have successfully helped to shape the strategic direction of the academy.
- They fulfil their duties diligently, including overseeing the performance management of the headteacher, and confirming that the academy's arrangements for safeguarding students are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in the academy and are committed to achieving further improvement. They ensure that the academy performance management process rewards good teaching and challenges underperformance.
- Governors understand the academy's performance data and regularly use it to inform the questions they ask the senior leadership team and to help them monitor the performance of significant student groups, such as the progress of disadvantaged students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. Students are calm and orderly when moving between lessons and at breaks and lunchtimes. They are almost always polite and courteous to staff and each other.
- Students are proud of their academy. They drop very little litter and look after the academy site with great care. They arrive promptly to lessons and almost always have the right equipment.
- Students are usually focused and industrious when working, and lessons have a purposeful and productive atmosphere. Students are confident when contributing to class discussions. The positive attitudes of students to their learning have a strong impact on their progress. Incidents of low-level disruption in lessons have declined.
- Students arrive at the academy punctually and many arrive before the normal start of the academy day to undertake additional learning activities, such as GCSE modern foreign language courses.
- Exclusion rates have declined and are below the national average.
- The academy is implementing a number of strategies to reduce higher than normal levels of persistent absence amongst a small group of students. As these strategies have not yet had sufficient impact, overall attendance levels currently remain below the national average.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The academy undertakes its obligations for safeguarding, for example in recruitment, with appropriate rigour.
- Students say that they feel safe at the academy and, without exception, parents and staff alike believe that all students are safe and well cared for. The academy provides high-quality pastoral care and students understand which adults they should go to if they have a problem or concern.
- Students say that there is very little bullying, and academy records show that, when incidents do occur, they are swiftly dealt with well and appropriately recorded. The academy makes it clear to students that any occurrences of racism or other forms of prejudice are not tolerated.
- Students develop a clear understanding of how to keep themselves and each other safe in different situations. However, important messages about the risks associated with computers and mobile phones, which are effectively communicated to students in Years 9 to 11, are not reiterated as strongly as they should be to sixth form students.

The quality of teaching is good

- Effective teaching has a positive impact on learning in English, mathematics and across the wider range of subjects taught at the academy, and students make good progress as a result.
- Teachers create positive, trusting relationships and they ensure that their classrooms are constructive learning environments. Students listen attentively to teachers' explanations and are keen to answer and ask questions to support their learning.
- Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan lessons that build coherently on what students already know and can do. They use a wide variety of effective teaching strategies.
- The quality of marking has become a strength of the academy. It is regular and thorough, and provides helpful feedback to students about how they can improve their work. Students respond effectively to the advice given.
- Teachers use effective questioning to assess students' understanding and to encourage students to think through the answers to problems and questions for themselves.
- Students read widely because teachers provide a range of structured opportunities for them to do so, including during tutor periods, English lessons, library visits and communication skills lessons.
- Teachers maintain consistently high expectations that all students will make good progress in their lessons. However, they do not always identify which students are capable of making even greater progress than this. As a result they do not always provide work that allows students to reach the highest standards of which they are capable.
- Teachers successfully structure work which is tailored to ensure good learning for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Teaching assistants are not always deployed as effectively as possible when they are working with individual students and small groups.
- Teachers plan work that ensures that students make good progress in the development of their literacy, numeracy and communication skills. However, the agreed academy approach to improving literacy is not always applied with equal thoroughness in every subject.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the academy in Year 9 with standards which are below average. They make good progress and, as a result, for each of the last three years, the proportion of students that attained five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics has been in line with, or above, the national average.
- The academy carefully assesses the attainment of students in English and mathematics when they first join in Year 9. The inspection confirmed that this assessment is rigorous and accurate. Strong teaching in both subjects ensures that students of all abilities learn well and the proportion of students achieving nationally expected levels of progress from these starting points is above the national average. The proportion of students exceeding nationally expected levels of progress from these starting points is in line with the national average.
- Students join the sixth form with attainment that is below that found on average nationally. They make strong progress and leave with levels of attainment in both academic and vocational subjects which are in line with or above the national average.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress in relation to

their starting points.

- The most-able students make good progress. However, academy leaders are aware that entering students early for mathematics has not always led to the most-able students attaining the highest grades of which they were capable and they have now ended this strategy.
- The gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged students and other students, both in the academy and nationally, amounted to over one GCSE grade in both English and mathematics in 2014. However, evidence gathered during the inspection shows that the progress of disadvantaged students currently at the academy is accelerating rapidly and these gaps are narrowing considerably.
- Students acquire and deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding across the range of subjects they study. The good progress they make in developing their literacy, numeracy and communication skills allows almost every student to move confidently and successfully onto the next stage of their education or employment.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Leaders have successfully responded to the issues raised at the last inspection and secured the required improvement. This has been achieved by careful planning and a consistent focus on improving teaching and learning.
- Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below the average found nationally. Students are taught well and make good progress. As a result, they leave with attainment overall that is in line with the national average in academic subjects and well above the national average in vocational subjects.
- The sixth form curriculum is broad and balanced. Students can choose between a wide range of academic and vocational courses. A large majority successfully complete their chosen courses of study.
- The small number of students who need to retake their GCSE examinations in English or mathematics are well supported to do so.
- Teaching is consistently effective in ensuring that students make good progress over time. Most teachers have high expectations, and plan interesting activities drawing upon their secure subject knowledge. Teachers use a wide range of teaching styles, equipping students with the skills to work independently and to engage confidently in group work and discussion.
- The behaviour of sixth form students is good. Students attend regularly, and attendance continues to improve. Students are punctual and make good use of the periods of time when they are not being taught to complete independent study. Students in the sixth form feel safe, secure and well cared for.
- Students receive high-quality support and guidance when preparing applications for entry to university. This helps a high proportion to be successful, with some securing places at highly selective universities, including Oxford and Cambridge. Guidance and support is also of a high quality for those who decide to enter employment or undertake further training.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. It is not outstanding because there is too much variability between the performance of different subjects and, over the last two years, achievement at A2 has not been as high as achievement at AS level.

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	137169
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	461424

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	940
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Packer
Headteacher	Tim Carroll
Date of previous school inspection	24-25 April 2013
Telephone number	01525 636700
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