

Staffordshire University Academy

Marston Road, Hednesford, Cannock, WS12 4JH

Inspection dates 18–19 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management	Good		2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good		2
Quality of teaching	Requires improvement		3
Achievement of pupils	Requires improvement		3
Sixth form provision	Requires improvement		3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that all groups of students make good progress and achieve well in all subjects.
- The gaps between the attainment in English and mathematics of disadvantaged students and other students are too wide.
- The tasks set by teachers are not always well matched to the different abilities within each class. This means that the most-able students are not sufficiently challenged and the least-able students sometimes find work too difficult.
- The quality of marking and assessment is inconsistent, so students do not always know how well they are doing. Not all teachers check that students are responding to the advice they give on how to improve further.
- The use of a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum has not always enabled students to develop basic skills before embarking on examination courses.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Although improving, students' achievement is not yet high enough.
- Attendance rates, including in the sixth form, are not high enough to secure consistently good learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal and Vice Principal, well supported by their senior team and by the governing body, have firmly established their ambitions for the academy. They have comprehensively addressed the issues raised by the previous inspection, including changing the academy's ineffective curriculum plan. The impact of these actions is now being seen.
- Leaders have been relentless in eradicating inadequate teaching and establishing their high expectations of both staff and students. Strong new appointments are already resulting in increasing students' progress.
- Students behave well. They are enthusiastic about their learning and keen to do well. They value the support that teachers provide.
- Students say that the school keeps them safe, and they have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- Leaders have established very effective strategies to raise literacy levels. Together with a strong literacy focus in all subjects, intensive support for younger students is leading to more rapid progress.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is strong. Students have a good understanding of modern British values.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students’ learning in lessons across all year groups and subjects. Four of the lessons were seen with one of the academy’s senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body and staff. A telephone conversation took place with a representative from the multi-academy trust.
- The inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at policies, the academy’s own assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and its plans for development. They also looked at records of lesson observations, information about students’ progress, safeguarding documents and samples of students’ work.
- The views of the 16 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, together with the academy’s own survey of parents’ views. Inspectors also took individual communications from parents into account, as well as the 51 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Helen Keenan	Additional Inspector
Michael Miller	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It is sponsored by Staffordshire University. The chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, a National Leader of Education, provides support for the academy's leaders.
- Most students are White British. Very few are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is above average.
- Full- and part-time, off-site alternative courses are currently provided for a small number of students in Years 10 and 11 at Chase Lea Pupil Referral Unit, including courses provided by Peak Pursuits and Nova Training.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- There has been a large turnover of teaching staff and the leadership team since the previous inspection; two new Vice Principals were appointed in April 2013, one of whom was appointed as Principal in October 2014. Nearly all staff in the mathematics department are newly appointed from January 2015, including the head of mathematics.
- The school provides a voluntary Saturday club to provide extra revision or support sessions, throughout the year.
- The academy moved into new buildings in November 2013.
- A partnership with Kingsmead School and Cannock Chase High School has been established to share the managed moves of students at risk of exclusion.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching, so that all students, including in the sixth form, make rapid progress by ensuring that:
 - all teachers plan tasks that are appropriately challenging for students of all abilities, fully stretching those of the highest ability, while ensuring that those of lower ability are sufficiently well supported, so that all groups of students, particularly the disadvantaged and the most able, make good or better progress
 - consistently ensure that teachers' marking informs students how well they are doing and what they need to do next, and that teachers check that students respond to this advice to improve their work.
- Raise attendance levels, including in the sixth form, by communicating with students and parents the importance of full attendance.
- Fully implement the planned changes to the curriculum, so that students better develop their basic skills before embarking on examination courses.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Staff told inspectors how much they value the open and transparent way in which the new Principal and Vice Principal lead the academy and how proud they are to be part of the academy's rapid improvements. Since taking up their posts, the Principal and Vice Principal have been rigorous in addressing the many issues that were hindering students' progress. Their effective actions have included establishing strong leadership at all levels, eradicating inadequate teaching, securing a greater stability in staffing and ensuring that the curriculum better meets the needs of the students. The academy shows a strong capacity to improve further.
- Procedures to check on the quality of teaching are robust and include lesson observations, talking to students, looking at their work and examining progress data to ensure that teaching is leading to good progress. Leaders have been quick to identify underperformance and intensive support is provided to improve the practice of teachers experiencing difficulties. Leaders have high expectations and poor teaching is not tolerated. Leaders ensure that only those teachers who meet their targets and achieve the expected standards are rewarded with pay rises.
- Training is closely matched to teachers' individual needs and good practice is shared. As a result, the quality of teaching is improving strongly and leaders are working to ensure a consistency of approach.
- Senior leaders have reorganised the leadership structure into four faculties. Faculty leaders are now strongly driving improvement in their areas of responsibility. They hold teachers to account for students' progress and, in turn they are accountable to senior leaders in meetings, where the progress of every individual student is examined.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Students value the advice and guidance they receive, and leaders check closely on the quality of teaching.
- Since the previous inspection, target setting, linked to nationally expected progress rates, has been introduced so that students now have a clear idea of their target grade. This is raising the aspirations of students and the expectations of staff.
- The achievement of all groups of students is carefully monitored, ensuring that all have equal opportunity and that there is no discrimination. Leaders have established an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance so that students say that they 'feel free to be ourselves'.
- Progress checks enable leaders to quickly identify any underachievement and to take quick action to tackle it. For example, it was recognised that there was a gap in the performance of boys and girls, particularly in literacy. A wide range of strategies were implemented to address this disparity, including the purchase of books that appeal more to boys and establishing a boys' reading club.
- The curriculum was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Leaders ensure that all students learn a foreign language from Year 7 and have the opportunity to study triple science at Key Stage 4. In addition, they have consulted parents before putting plans into place to change back to a two-year Key Stage 4 in order to enable students to build their basic skills sufficiently in Key Stage 3 before embarking on examination courses. This action has resulted in no student being entered for examination before the end of Year 11.
- Strategies to improve literacy have been very effective. Year 7 'catch-up' funding has enabled strong support to be provided for the many students who start at the academy with low basic skills in literacy and numeracy. This support continues through Year 8 and beyond for those students who need it, and has greatly improved the ability of all groups of students to read fluently.
- Alternative provision is used for a small number of students facing challenging circumstances, and great care is taken to check on their well-being, including their attendance.

- A wide range of enrichment activities, particularly in sport, provide good opportunities for students to develop leadership and teamwork skills, and to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Assemblies and tutor time provide opportunities for students to reflect on issues that affect them and their responsibility as citizens of modern Britain.
 - Students told inspectors how much they value the quality of careers advice they receive and the support that enables them to make appropriate option choices. Strong links with the academy sponsors are raising students' aspirations through, for example, visits to Staffordshire University, including residential courses for Year 7 students.
 - Leaders have ensured that the behaviour and safety of students remains a strength, as it was in the previous inspection. They have worked to improve attendance and punctuality further. However attendance rates, particularly in the sixth form, are only broadly average. Students say that they value the new fencing and that this attention to site safety has made them feel more secure. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and meet current requirements.
 - The academy's leaders value the continuing strong support provided through the academy trust, including from their Education Improvement Partner, whose regular visits have supported leaders at all levels to address the issues that were preventing students from achieving their full potential.
 - The additional funding provided through the pupil premium is being used effectively to support disadvantaged students. This support is now having a dramatic impact on closing the gap between this group and their peers in Key Stage 3 and, particularly, in raising their standards of literacy.
- **The governance of the school:**
- Governors are highly ambitious for the academy and express the vision that the academy should be a hub for the community. They have been relentless in their drive to secure strong leadership and have provided rigorous support and challenge for leaders to ensure the improvements that are now being seen. They are fully aware of all the issues faced by the academy. They have a very good understanding of progress data and how the academy compares to schools nationally.
 - Governors use their variety of expertise to good effect, checking on all aspects of the academy's work. Regular visits to classes on governors' open days provide them with first-hand experience of the quality of teaching. Governors are actively involved in ensuring that good teaching is rewarded and any underperformance is tackled.
 - Governors are fully aware of the issues related to disadvantaged students and check closely that the additional funding is now having an impact on closing the gap. The governing body ensures that staff and students are kept safe.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students are keen to learn and show an eagerness to contribute, even when the tasks they are set are too easy or uninteresting. Students say that most teachers use the new strategies to manage behaviour, so their learning is rarely disrupted and that behaviour in lessons is typically good. When exciting activities are taking place they are quick to settle down, listen and follow their teacher's instructions. Parents and staff expressed the view that students behave well.
- Behaviour around the academy is calm and sensible. Students are proud of their inspiring new building, and there is no graffiti or litter. They wear their uniform with pride and present themselves well. They are polite and courteous to adults.
- Students enjoy taking responsible roles; for example, acting as prefects or being elected to the school council. Older students support younger ones well.
- Students with behaviour difficulties are well supported and told inspectors how this strong support has enabled them to manage their own behaviour more effectively. The partnership with two neighbouring

schools has enabled students to be moved to another school within the partnership rather than face exclusion. The inclusion centre, an area where students with behavioural and other difficulties are supported, has been very effective in reducing exclusion rates.

- The academy is working to improve attendance and persistent absences have reduced considerably as a result of the support provided for students and their families. However, overall attendance is only just at average levels and in the sixth form, some students told inspectors that they understand that they are not reaching their targets because of their irregular attendance.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Parents and staff agree. Students have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when using social media, and say that there is always someone to go to if they are troubled. They particularly value the support of their head of year.
- Students say that bullying is rare and dealt with quickly should it occur, and that students themselves actively promote anti-bullying. They say that derogatory language is not tolerated and very swift, firm action would be taken if there was any racism.
- Students and their families facing challenging circumstances are well supported, including through the use of external agencies. Students value advice provided by the school nurse. The behaviour and safety of those attending alternative provision are carefully checked and regular visits made.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Leaders' monitoring of all aspects of teaching throughout the year and the progress that students make shows that, although the majority of teaching is now good, there remains some inconsistency, including in the sixth form.
- In a minority of lessons observed, all students were undertaking exactly the same task which resulted in some students finding work too easy and some too difficult. Teachers did not always notice quickly enough to provide additional support or challenge. Although all teachers are aware of the abilities of different groups of students in their classes, they do not always provide tasks that are appropriate for the lowest ability or that sufficiently stretch the most-able students.
- Leaders have established high expectations in the marking of students' work, including that students should respond to the advice they receive on how to improve. Where this practice is exemplary, students are informed where they have reached in comparison to their target level, and what they need to do further. Teachers then check that students have responded, by redrafting their work or trying another challenge. This practice is inconsistent and some students' respond with superficial comments rather than applying their teachers' advice.
- Where students make the fastest progress, teachers have high expectations of their students, providing tasks that enable them to build their knowledge and understanding step by step, and by setting tasks that are interesting and appropriate. For example, in a Spanish lesson observed, students in Year 9 worked in small groups to write a report on gang culture in Honduras as part of a project on Latin America. Their previous study had focused on music and art while building their understanding of the language. Students were able to read Spanish fluently and to translate using resources such as 'word walls' to expand their vocabulary. As a result, all students showed enjoyment and made rapid progress.
- Teachers promote students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development well, providing opportunities for students to discuss and reflect on moral and social issues or to explore different cultures. There is also a strong focus on promoting literacy in all subjects, with teachers focusing on the correct technical language for the subject and checking on the use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Relationships between adults and students are warm and classrooms calm.

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students join the academy with basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics that are typically below average and with a below-average proportion of higher attaining students. Students currently in Key Stage 3 joined the academy with broadly average basic skills. The proportion of students gaining five or more good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, by the end of Year 11 in 2014 was below average.
- Because of their below-average starting points, students need to make better than the nationally expected progress rates in order to catch up. In 2014, students made expected progress in mathematics but only a small proportion made better than expected progress. Progress in English was well below expected levels. Assessments indicate that students in the current Year 11 will make better progress in English by the end of 2015, as a result of improved teaching. Progress in mathematics is not expected to improve significantly because this year group has been subject to inadequate teaching in this subject over time and turbulence in staffing. One student told inspectors, 'We have had five maths teachers in the past few years.'
- The academy's assessments indicate that progress rates lower down the school are much stronger and the new teachers in mathematics are already having an impact on improving students' attitudes to the subject and increasing progress rates. There is no significant difference in achievement between students of different ethnic backgrounds or between those who speak English as an additional language and other students. Students following alternative courses are achieving well.
- The progress of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is improving. They receive strong support from the special educational needs coordinator and her team and, where they are taught in small groups, they achieve well as the result of encouraging and patient teaching that enables them to build their understanding at an appropriate pace. In some larger classes, teaching does not provide the support that they need.
- New leaders have increased the expectation of the achievement of the most-able students. Current assessments for Year 11 indicate that an increased proportion of students will make and exceed expected progress rates in English, although a smaller proportion are expected to do so in mathematics. Their progress in this subject is already showing improvement, despite the new staff being in post for only a very short time.
- In 2014, the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged students and other students in the school and those nationally was too wide. Like the current Year 11, this group had suffered from the turbulence in teaching that previously existed. In English, disadvantaged students in Year 11 were a quarter of a GCSE grade behind others in the school but over a grade behind students nationally. In mathematics, they were half a grade behind others in the school and one grade behind students nationally. There were even larger gaps in rates of progress. The academy's rigorous assessment data confidently indicates that the gap has now closed for students lower down the school as a result of the improved teaching and support they now receive, including promoting their regular attendance.
- In 2014, students were entered for GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 10, having followed a two-year course. Few students re-took their examinations despite many not achieving a grade C or above. Following the changes in the school's curriculum plan, students are no longer entered early for GCSE.
- Sixth form students make progress that is just below national levels in academic subjects and just above average in work-based courses. Standards are gradually rising and the academy's assessments indicate that they are expected to rise further in 2015.
- The literacy programme in Years 7 and 8 is having a dramatic effect on improving students' reading proficiency. Here, disadvantaged students are making even better progress than their classmates. Students' success is celebrated on the television screens displayed around the academy and students show a love of reading across the school. For example, a Year 9 class showed great excitement as they read to each other in small groups, challenging each other to explain the characters' relationships.

The sixth form provision requires improvement

- Sixth form students are now benefiting from improved teaching. The impact of this is now beginning to be seen in improving rates of progress and rising standards. There remains some inconsistency in the quality of teaching, however, as there is the main school, in the level of challenge and quality of feedback provided.
- The leader of the sixth form checks carefully, both on the quality of teaching and on students' progress, and provides support for students who are underachieving, including those who face challenging circumstances.
- Students following work-based courses generally perform better than those on academic courses, most having followed work-based courses in Key Stage 4. Some following A-level courses have found the transition from work-based courses to academic study more challenging and, as a result, performance at AS level in 2014 was below average.
- There is no significant difference between the performance of the small proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs or disadvantaged students and their peers. All students are expected to re-sit their GCSE English and mathematics examinations until they achieve at least a grade C.
- Students show good attitudes to their studies. Strong working relationships with teachers and other students contribute very positively to learning and prepare students for the way in which they will study if they go on to higher education.
- Study programmes are now well matched to students' prior attainment and aspirations, and ensure that they are well prepared for their next steps in education, training or employment. All students undertake work experience during their courses.
- The leader of the sixth form ensures that all students receive high quality advice and guidance to support their subject choices. As a result, the proportion of students staying on into Year 13 to complete their courses is increasing. Students speak highly of the ongoing support they receive to ensure that they achieve their goals. The department has high expectations of students and works to raise their aspirations through a variety of university visits and, in particular, strong links with the academy sponsors. As a result, a high proportion of students go on to higher education. All students go on to education, employment or training.
- Sixth form students contribute well to the life of the academy, supporting younger students and leading activities. The academy provides them with many opportunities to reflect on the issues that face them and they have a good understanding of modern British values.

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	137164
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	453503

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	565
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Richards
Principal	Rowena Hillier
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2013
Telephone number	01543 512415
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