

University of Chester CE Academy

164 Whitby Road, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 6EA

Inspection dates

31 March – 1 April 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

- Not all students are making sufficient progress to achieve national expectations in English and in mathematics.
- A small minority of boys and disadvantaged students have not made fast enough progress over time in English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching across all subjects is not consistently good. Teaching does not always engage students or give them confidence they can achieve well.
- Students do not always work on topics that match their stage in learning; explanations and written tasks are too hard or too easy for some students.
- Students do not always listen carefully in lessons and a small minority of students sometimes disturb teaching so the learning of other students slows.
- Some leaders and managers have only recently been appointed and have not had time to see the impact of their plans to improve. However, overall the school has improved since its previous inspection.
- Some governors have an inaccurate view of the quality of teaching because leaders have sometimes communicated an over-generous view of the quality of teaching.
- Senior leaders, governors and the Trust do not monitor the website closely enough to ensure all policies are up to date.
- Not enough sixth form students achieve higher standards in A-level courses because not all students are sufficiently challenged by teaching and as a result, the sixth form requires improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- The school's senior leaders and most middle leaders have taken swift action to increase the proportion of students making the progress expected of them.
- Students feel safe and behave well in and around the school. The majority behave well in lessons. The vast majority of parents and all staff agree students are safe and well supported.
- School leaders and governors have developed an exceptionally positive and productive partnership with a high achieving teaching school. This has led to a recent and rapid improvement in teaching which has begun to improve students' progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching sessions, involving over 30 teachers. Three sessions were observed jointly by inspectors alongside senior leaders.
- Inspectors met formally with groups of students and talked informally to students in lessons and around the school.
- They also discussed the school's work with the Interim Managing Director of the Trust and the Trust's School Improvement Leader. They met with the executive principal from the partner teaching school and the director of the teaching school. They discussed aspects of the school with the principal, senior leaders, pastoral and subject leaders, and the leaders of behaviour and attendance. Inspectors also met with the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee, who is also a National Leader of Governance, and four members of the Committee.
- Inspectors took into account the 21 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and took note of the school's survey of the views of parents.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school, including students' written work in their books and the school's records of students' progress and attainment. They also looked at minutes of the Statement of Action Committee meetings, reports from the partner teaching school, the school's judgements of its performance and the plans to improve the school. Inspectors also looked closely at records in relation to safeguarding, child protection, attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

Nell Banfield, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Clive Hurran	Additional Inspector
Jonathan Smart	Additional Inspector
Linda Foley	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

- The University of Chester Church of England Academy is a slightly smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is slightly smaller than the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by pupil premium funding (additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is much higher than the national average.
- Most students are of White British heritage. Very few students are in the early stages of learning to speak English.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- The school has established the Emmaus Centre within the school to support individual students in improving their behaviour.
- A very small number of students from Year 10 and Year 11 attend courses for some, or all of, the time away from the school site. They study English and mathematics and vocational subjects at West Cheshire College and the Education Network Pupil Referral Unit medical team, and receive tuition at home for short periods of time.
- As part of the school's efforts to improve standards, the school works with the executive principal of St John Plessington Teaching School who is a National Leader of Education.
- The school moved into a new, purpose-built site in September 2012.
- In the last two years, there has been a significant number of staffing changes, including changes to the academy's leadership. A number of subject leaders, including the sixth form leader, are recently appointed to their posts. There are further senior and middle leaders to be appointed.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and ensure good progress for all students, particularly boys and disadvantaged students, by:
 - making sure feedback to students gives explicit and helpful suggestions about how students can improve their work
 - making sure all students respond to suggestions made by teachers about how they can improve their written work
 - providing activities and explanations to suit the different levels of ability so that students understand the work they have to do and can make fast and confident progress
 - using school systems and procedures consistently and promptly to eradicate the small proportion of behaviour that distracts others from their learning.
- Ensure leaders, managers and governors check all policies are up to date and comply with current legislation to assure consistency of practice.
- Ensure leaders use their improved monitoring of teaching to report an accurate view of the quality of teaching to governors to assure consistency of practice.
- Improve achievement in the sixth form by leaders checking that teachers plan teaching that provides higher levels of challenge so more students achieve the higher levels at A level.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leadership requires improvement. The executive principal, the academy principal, senior and most middle leaders have taken decisive and partially effective action to improve teaching and assessment rapidly since September 2014. The impact of these actions has not been effective in improving the achievement of all students consistently across all key stages and all subjects.
- Teaching is now thoroughly evaluated using a range of evidence from teaching, from students' written work in their books, from discussion with students about their learning, and from increasingly robust and accurate assessments. As a result, leaders, including most subject leaders, are able to identify how they can improve teaching so the increasing progress seen can be sustained. However, in science, teaching is less effective and the progress made by students is not increasing as rapidly as it is in other subjects.
- The partnership working between academy leaders and leaders from the teaching school is providing expertise, support and training for the academy's teachers and middle leaders to bring about a rapid improvement in the quality of teaching. Teachers speak highly of the quality of the training and the positive impact it is having on their teaching.
- Leaders and managers contribute to the school's detailed evaluation of its performance. However, while the achievement of Year 11 and the sixth form are analysed closely, the achievement of students in Key Stage 3 is less well analysed.
- The management of teachers' performance is linked closely with high standards for teaching. Teachers whose performance leads to consistently good student progress are recognised and rewarded appropriately.
- The school's use of Year 7 catch up funding is improving the reading and writing skills of students, especially those in Key Stage 3. Pupil premium funding is used to provide more teachers so classes are smaller, and for additional teaching for those who need to catch up or practise their learning more often. As a result, the progress of more students, especially those in Year 7 and in Year 11, is accelerating.
- Leaders have quickly and effectively improved assessment as well as teaching so they can check that all students' progress is increasing. The standards reached by boys and disadvantaged students in most year groups are now beginning to rise, and are closer to the standards reached by most students in the school and nationally. This is evidence of the school's commitment to all students having an equal opportunity to succeed in achieving high standards from their starting points.
- The newly appointed middle leaders have clear plans to improve teaching and progress in their subjects. Their plans are beginning to have impact. However, it is too early for some of the actions taken to have improved the learning of all students.
- The curriculum has been effectively reviewed and now offers a greater number of subjects available to be studied at Key Stages 4 and 5. All subjects are taught by specialist teachers and students are beginning to achieve higher standards because of teachers' increased subject knowledge. All students now study a modern foreign language. All students are effectively guided in making subject choices for Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. They study academic and vocational subjects, including a range of apprenticeship courses in the sixth form. This and wider guidance, including careers education, prepares students well for the future.
- The curriculum develops students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development well. Students have extensive opportunities for quiet reflection. For example, during the Easter celebration, students' behaviour and respect for the key messages of Easter were exemplary. Students took part in readings and performances with ease and confidence. They have a rich range of activities out of lessons which develops their skills in working together, enables them to appreciate the contribution of others and fosters good relationships. They are able to explore different lifestyles and beliefs through a variety of speakers and through the curriculum. As a result, there are virtually no discriminatory attitudes, or examples of discriminatory or derogatory language, permeating the life of the school.
- All students contribute to, and take part in, the school's regular and frequent student council meetings. This democratic discussion helps them understand and appreciate how British laws and customs support individual rights of free speech, alongside respect for the views of others. In addition, in response to a discriminatory act in the locality, the school sought external advice about how best to ensure a balanced response in line with UK values and laws. As a result, students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- School leaders check the performance of students who follow courses away from the school site. They are vigilant in ensuring that courses meet students' individual needs and enable them to gain accreditation in English, mathematics and vocational subjects. The behaviour, safety and attendance of students who attend courses at other providers or settings are well monitored. School staff work closely with the staff in

other settings to ensure students are well supported by a coordinated staff team.

- The school's arrangements to keep students and staff safe in the school meet requirements. The school's written policy has lagged behind the good quality safeguarding practice and has now been updated to reflect current legislation. As a result, the school is confident in securing students' safety and well-being.
- The school's external partners are working extremely effectively together to raise standards and increase progress with increasing impact. The Trust has taken steps to improve the focus of its support so the school is benefiting from a wide network of additional expertise.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Following the review of governance soon after the last inspection, a Statement of Action Committee was formed, led by a National Leader of Governance, which has increased the support and challenge from the Committee for school leaders.
 - The Committee has a clear understanding of the school's improved and detailed assessment data and is clear about how students' performance is improving and where further improvement needs to happen.
 - It is vigilant in monitoring the impact of additional funding and follows the progress of groups of students closely.
 - Governors do not always check that all policies are in line with current legislation.
 - They support school leaders in ensuring that financial rewards and increase in status are directed to the teachers whose performance leads to students' good progress. They are fully aware of how underperformance is tackled.
 - The Committee meets frequently and knows where the stronger teaching is developing. However, it is less clear about the amount of teaching which needs further improvement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because, although behaviour is consistently good around the school, this is not always the case in lessons. A small minority of students chat or quietly disengage from learning, and a few comment loudly on the contributions of other students to the lesson. Teachers do not always use the school's systems to check inappropriate behaviour quickly or systematically and students, when checked later, become truculent and less prepared to adjust to expectations. This prevents some lessons from proceeding smoothly.
- Overall, however, attitudes of the majority of students in lessons are good. They are engaged in their learning by teaching that harnesses their interests and by good relationships with their teachers.
- The school's analysis of behaviour indicates that the number of incidents has steadily reduced as the school has raised its expectations of how students should behave. The good behaviour around school is evidence of success in this regard. The Emmaus Centre provides good opportunities for students whose behaviour is not of the highest standard to catch up on their work and reflect on how they should behave.
- The rate of exclusions has reduced and attendance is improving so it is now close to the national average. Fewer students are persistently absent, though the number remains higher than that found nationally.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The vast majority of students get on well with each other and with adults. Visitors are welcomed and treated with respect. Parents expressed few concerns about behaviour and felt their child was safe and well cared for in school.
- The school takes many effective steps to make sure students are safe. For example, a recent residential experience for Year 7 students included a range of engaging workshop activities organised by an external group, to ensure students are fully aware of risks and how to keep themselves safe.
- Students are also helped by the curriculum to understand the risks they will encounter, such as being aware that people on social networks might not be who they say they are. They also fully understand how someone can be flattered into building relationships which might exploit their good nature and lead them to make risky decisions.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because, although more teaching than in the past is leading to better progress, this is not consistent across subjects and key stages.

- Although more teachers are now planning teaching that engages students and makes them think hard about what they know and can do, tasks and activities are sometimes too hard for those students who lack confidence or who have gaps in their learning. As a result, students lose heart and chat or become distracted. Similarly, some work and explanations in teaching are too easy for some of the most able students. They repeat work they can already do and are not able to move on to the next stage in their learning. Consequently, not all students make the progress they should.
- Most teachers mark students' work regularly and some make helpful suggestions of small tasks that students can do to practise areas where their learning is less strong. However, few students respond to these suggestions and do not improve their learning as a result.
- In some lessons teachers' effective explanations enable students who initially lack confidence to apply what they know to new or more complex situations. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson, the teacher explained a complex idea simply so students understood the concept quickly. Students were presented with a diagram of an alarm system and used their knowledge of how to plot equal distances from static points to see if they could enter the room without setting off the alarm. This strengthened their understanding of the concept effectively and enabled them to complete a task that had appeared too difficult.
- Students who have difficulty with reading and writing are helped to improve by regular practise using specialised literacy programmes and carefully planned written work. They gain in confidence as a result and find their improved reading skills help them in lessons. Students read regularly in English lessons and students have choices that interest them in the well-stocked library. Students are accustomed to reading a book they have with them because staff have unspoken expectations that students will read when time is available. Subject leaders and teachers are beginning to plan a common approach to developing mathematical skills across subjects, but these plans are in the early stages of development.
- Teaching assistants provide unobtrusive and helpful support in lessons for students with additional needs. They also support other students who need a brief additional explanation or a quiet word to keep them on task.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because not all students are improving their learning at the same good rate in English and mathematics.
- Many more students arrive at the school working at lower standards than found nationally. Although teaching and progress are improving, this is not consistent enough across subjects and year groups for some students with lower starting points to achieve at, or above, national standards.
- Year 11 and Year 7 students are making consistently good progress. More boys are now making better progress but not in all year groups. More disadvantaged students are now making the progress expected of them, and some are making faster progress than expected, but not in all aspects of English and mathematics and particularly in Year 9.
- The most able students are now making faster progress, especially in English. More learning is carefully planned, more teachers have higher expectations and students are guided skilfully towards challenging tasks and resources. A group of Year 8 students used the library space well to choose a book and apply their knowledge and understanding of persuasive writing to give a speech to the rest of the class to compete as to who could entice the most students to read their book. This task meant students could be guided to material matched to their ability. The teacher prompted and suggested vocabulary and phrasing to improve students' speeches. Boys and girls, and disadvantaged students, achieved equally well.
- In 2014, disadvantaged students attained in English one third of a grade lower than non-disadvantaged students in the school and two thirds of a grade lower than non-disadvantaged students nationally. Disadvantaged students attained in mathematics two thirds of a grade lower than non-disadvantaged students in the school and a full grade lower than non-disadvantaged students nationally. Around 15% of disadvantaged students make slower progress than students nationally in English. Almost 33% of disadvantaged students make slower progress than students nationally in mathematics. However, this group of students is beginning to make faster progress and reach higher standards because more teaching is of a good quality, including in mathematics.
- The school's measures of progress are now more accurate and are regularly checked by the partner school. Measures indicate students in Year 11 are currently achieving higher standards than their peers achieved in 2014 in English and mathematics.
- Students following courses away from the school site are making better progress because the courses engage and interest them, and because the settings are more suited to the ways they learn.

- The school does not enter any students early for GCSE examinations.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- The sixth form leader is new to the post and consequently does not have as sharp an understanding of the quality of teaching as other senior leaders. The improvement in the performance of students working at the higher A level grades is not improving as rapidly as it needs to do to ensure success for them. The sixth form leader has now put systems in place which ensure that achievement is given a high priority so that students are beginning to be appropriately challenged.
- The quality of teaching requires improvement because not all teachers have high enough expectations of what students can achieve. The activities and tasks set are not always challenging enough and do not move students on in their learning at a fast enough pace.
- Not enough students are achieving the higher grades in academic subjects at A level. Despite some improvement, this has been the case for the last three years. Achievement in vocational subjects is in line with national averages. Students achieve higher standards in some subjects than in others.
- Disadvantaged students achieve standards close to those achieved by non-disadvantaged students. In 2014, a small group of students followed a sports qualification which included English and mathematics GCSE. They achieved well in sports but not in GCSE. Their curriculum has now been reviewed and students are to follow more appropriate functional skills courses so their achievement can improve.
- The achievement of those students who enter the sixth form working at lower standards than those found nationally is beginning to accelerate but is not yet improving fast enough.
- The sixth form ethos is strong. Students are responsible and mature and they help younger students to improve their literacy skills effectively. Students take their private and independent study seriously and use their time well.
- The care and support for students is good and they are well supported in maintaining their studies. Attendance in the sixth form is improving and staff are increasingly vigilant in following up absence to reduce its frequency.
- Students are guided effectively to suitable courses after Year 13 and all students gained their first choice of university places in 2014.

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	135941
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	462636

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	700
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	147
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Marks
Headteacher	Kevin McDermott
Date of previous school inspection	10 October 2013
Telephone number	0151 350 6000
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