

Bexhill High Academy

Gunter's Lane, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN39 4BY

Inspection dates 29–30 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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Not enough teaching enables students to make good progress.
- Expectations of students are not always high enough. Some teachers do not set work which matches the needs of groups of students of different abilities, especially the more able.
- Many teachers have developed strategies to cope with the problems posed by the design of classrooms, but this still compromises the quality of learning.
- The academy is not working effectively with all parents to support their child's learning.
- Students' levels of literacy are below average. There are plans in place to raise standards, but they are not yet being delivered reliably and effectively throughout the academy.
- Middle leaders are not yet skilled enough to drive improvements rapidly and effectively, for example in supporting improvements in literacy.
- Too many students do not question their understanding and the depth of their learning closely enough, or show enough active interest in the work. Some waste time in lessons by quietly 'switching off'. A few disrupt learning sometimes.

The school has the following strengths

- The Principal has an excellent understanding of the academy's emerging strengths, and what still needs to improve. She is supported well by her senior team to bring about improvements.
- Improvements in teaching and learning are driven confidently and effectively. Because of this, teaching is improving and some is already good.
- Staff morale is good. There is a palpable sense of the academy 'going places' now.
- The new sponsors demonstrate determination to improve provision for students and staff. They have already made some significant contributions.
- Many students in Key Stage 4 show maturity and are determined to do well despite having been affected by the academy's troubled past.
- Achievement in Key Stage 3 is improving quickly.
- Students are well looked after, including those in the special unit with autism, and achieve well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons and made shorter visits to four others, many jointly with senior staff.
- Inspectors met with the Principal and other senior staff, representatives of the trust board, other staff, and groups of students, and had a telephone conversation with a consultant headteacher who represents the local authority.
- The academy's development planning, self-evaluation documents, policies and safeguarding procedures were scrutinised.
- There were only eight responses to Parent View, which meant that no analyses could be undertaken using this information. Inspectors were able to obtain insight into the views of parents from responses to parent questionnaires organised by the academy. The views of the 65 staff who returned questionnaires were taken into account.
- When the academy was previously inspected, in February 2013, it was judged to require special measures, and it subsequently received five monitoring inspections.

Inspection team

Alan Taylor-Bennett, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jan Allcorn	Additional Inspector
Angela Cook	Additional Inspector
Andrew Corish	Additional Inspector
Paul Murphy	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- The academy is larger than the average-size school.
- There have been significant changes in senior staff since the previous inspection. The Principal took up post in September 2014.
- Attwood Academies Trust became the new sponsors of the academy from 1 December 2014.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is higher than average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for students eligible for free school meals or those looked after by the local authority) is above the national average. Some students are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The academy serves a community with relatively little ethnic or cultural diversity.
- About 15 students in Key Stage 4 attend part time at Bexhill College to follow vocational courses, and 20 travel to Plumpton College one day each week to obtain qualifications in land-based studies.
- The academy has dedicated provision called the ASPie to support the needs of students with autistic spectrum disorders. Eleven students are currently supported in this unit.
- There is a separate Skills Unit a short distance from the main building. This is the base for vocational education and for a small number of students who are vulnerable or need special support for their behaviour.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standard which sets minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The academy building is split into large teaching 'pods', designed for up to 90 students. These have temporary partitions, pending a more extensive re-building programme.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to ensure that students' progress improves rapidly in all subjects, especially in science and design and technology, by:
 - raising expectations of students' achievements, particularly the more able
 - ensuring that teachers' planning builds in a wider range of challenges to students, more appropriate to their needs, including applying the academy's approach to home study consistently well
 - developing a wider range of teaching and learning techniques, including capitalising on the advantages offered by the planned structural changes to classrooms.
- Improve the effectiveness of middle leaders by:
 - providing training to ensure that all directors of study and subject leaders are driving the rapid improvements required in the quality of teaching and learning in their areas
 - monitoring lessons and students' work to make sure that the plans in place to raise students' standards of literacy, especially students' ability to write at length, are delivered reliably by all teachers.
- Improve students' behaviour and attitudes to learning by:
 - developing their confidence and ability to question their own understanding
 - operating the good quality systems in place to respond to instances of poor behaviour consistently and effectively, with the aim of eliminating the small amount of disruption to learning
 - providing better information to parents so that they are able to support the academy's approaches to improving achievement and attitudes to learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- The Principal is driving improvements with confidence and determination. She is supported by a strong senior team. As a result, the effectiveness of all aspects of the academy's work has improved this year, and there is considerable momentum building to sustain future developments. Several middle leaders, however, are at an early stage of learning how to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Senior leaders model best practice and provide some good quality training, but are having to shoulder much of the burden of academy improvement. Middle leaders' skills are developing quickly and there is a real sense in this team of enthusiasm for taking on wider responsibilities.
- Self-evaluation is accurate, candid and very useful. Insights shown by the academy's leadership into its strengths and development needs have resulted in high quality development plans. The priorities in these plans are communicated clearly to everyone, and many staff and students feel a part of this vision. This is supporting effective working relationships.
- Strategies to improve achievement, including literacy skills and new approaches to homework, have clarity and merit but are yet to make a big enough difference. This is due to the need to monitor their consistent implementation across the academy much more closely.
- The curriculum has been changed this year in response to the need to address previous serious weaknesses in provision for many students. Key Stage 3 is now well organised and there is breadth and balance in the range of subjects on offer. In Key Stage 4, some students have been ill served by previously poor curriculum organisation. The academy's current leadership has done as much as possible to improve provision for them while maintaining stability.
- There is a new well-designed programme to provide students with information about the range of opportunities open to them after school. A wide range of organisations, including local universities and businesses, are becoming involved. Events have been held, such as a careers convention, and visiting speakers organised. Although it is early days, this work has the potential to make a good contribution to raising students' ambitions, and helping students to make informed choices.
- Senior leaders are keen to prepare students well for the challenges that face them in the future. There is currently an emphasis on improving students' understanding of democracy through a mock election. More opportunities are being taken this year than ever before to obtain, and show value for, students' views about how their academy could improve. Many students demonstrate a great sense of fairness and want to show value and a better understanding of cultures and beliefs other than their own in order to address discrimination. Leaders acknowledge that plans in place to develop this work, together with a rich understanding of how laws are made and upheld, and how citizens contribute to this process, have not yet had good impact.
- Reliable assessment information now supports high quality analyses of the attainment and progress of every student, and for all groups of students in the academy. These data are beginning to be used effectively, for example as a regular agenda item in the regular meetings between senior staff and middle leaders. They are also used as a means of delivering the academy's commitment to equality of opportunity, driving specific responses to the underachievement of any group of students.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching are being led effectively this year. Senior staff make accurate judgements of the quality of students' learning in lessons. The academy has established good links with a wide range of sources of expertise and support. This includes new work with the local teaching school, bids for extra resources from the local partnership of schools to train teachers, and reviews of the work of subjects led by experts from other schools which are then used to steer external training and consultancy. The Principal orchestrates this wide range of support skilfully to ensure it is coherent and effective.
- Appropriate use is made of the pupil premium. These funds are used to pay for relevant aspects of the training of staff, extra support staff who work with small groups of disadvantaged students to help them catch up on learning, and to fund a learning mentor programme.
- There is a strong emphasis in the academy on the safety and welfare of students. All statutory requirements are met, and policies and guidelines around safeguarding and child protection are in place. Good links with external agencies, including with the designated officer at the local authority, enable rapid and effective responses to students' welfare or safety needs. The local authority has been sympathetic to the academy's currently reduced capacity to receive students with high levels of need who have been excluded from other schools.
- The achievement and welfare of students who attend alternative provision are monitored closely. Good systems are in place to inform the academy of any absences or concerns about the progress of these students promptly. Designated staff in the academy regularly visit the colleges attended by students in

Years 10 and 11 to keep in touch with tutors and other key staff there.

- The performance of teachers is now managed well and all teaching staff have appropriate individual targets and regular reviews allied to training opportunities. Similar measures for support staff are not yet in place.
 - Senior staff are well aware of the vital role that parents have to play in raising the achievement of students at the academy. Many parents were appreciative of the series of parents' information evenings held early in the autumn term by the new Principal to explain her vision for the academy. The quality of communications with parents has improved recently, and there are now regular reports home giving useful information to parents about their child's progress.
 - Parents of Year 7 students expressed considerably higher levels of satisfaction with how their child had settled into the academy this year compared to feedback in previous years. Plans are in place to expand the parent forum and to involve parents on a new Community Board. There are still relatively few opportunities for parents to learn how to support their child's learning, however.
 - The academy's new sponsor has already had a strong and positive impact on the academy. It immediately initiated a rigorous audit of the quality its leadership, and has reviewed the finances and other essential aspects of its work equally thoroughly and quickly. The sponsor has played a very significant role in obtaining the large amount of extra funding from the Department for Education needed to convert the large and unwieldy 'pod' spaces into classrooms, and to provide new computers and software for use by students.
- **The governance of the academy:**
- Governance is exercised by the new sponsor's trust board. This small group of people has, between them, a wide range of skills and experience, including in education and school improvement. Their commissioning of a full audit of essential aspects of the academy's work gave them a secure grasp of the quality of teaching and leadership in the academy which enables them to play an appropriate part in the new performance management arrangements.
 - Trustees are well placed to oversee decisions about which teachers should be rewarded with pay increments. One member of the board has expertise in the interpretation and use of performance data, and is able to help others to respond appropriately. The trustees show great determination to bring about significant improvements to the academy for the benefit of students, staff and the community.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement.
- The vast majority of students behave well around the site at break and lunchtimes, socialising happily and enjoying the company of friends. There is occasional jostling and shouting on stairwells, but students generally show respect for each other and their surroundings.
- Many students demonstrate a mature understanding of the needs of others. For example, in a group discussion with Year 11, several sensed when their friends with autism needed a moment of quiet and calmness in order to speak up, and made this happen without any fuss.
- Many demonstrate a lack of some basic skills associated with effective learning. Some older students in particular, who experienced the very large classes before the teaching 'pods' were sectioned off, have difficulty sustaining their concentration when not working directly with their teacher. When they find the work challenging, some give up quite quickly and, usually without any fuss or disruption, simply stop working.
- Despite their poor learning habits, many Years 10 and 11 students have a quiet sense of ambition and determination. They acknowledge the problems they experienced in their early years at the academy and show a willingness to move on and make the most of the opportunities now presented to them.
- Attitudes to learning are much more positive in Key Stage 3 as a result of currently better teaching and the better organisation of classroom spaces. Despite the distraction of sound travelling between teaching areas, many are able to maintain reasonable levels of concentration.
- Work is presented better in books this year and shows that students are taking more pride in their work.
- A small number of students sometimes disrupt learning. Little poor behaviour was seen in classrooms during the inspection, but students report that it affects some of their lessons.
- Attendance is still below the national average, but is steadily improving as a result of the better monitoring and rapid responses to absence in place this year. Exclusions are becoming less frequent as a result of

better teaching and a greater sense of purpose and organisation in the academy this year. There is good provision in the Skills Unit to support students with behavioural problems.

- A new reward system, Carrots, organised and run by the student council, is proving popular and supports students' better attitudes and behaviour.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Bullying is rare. Sometimes friendship groups break up and there are unkind words exchanged, more often by younger students. The few instances of the serious misuse of social network sites and physical bullying are rare, and are managed well by the academy.
- Students show a good understanding of e-safety and attribute this to useful information provided in lessons and tutor time.
- Students say that there is always someone to turn to for support in the academy, and that the help and advice received are timely and useful. The academy makes good use of its links with a range of outside agencies to provide support for students.
- Staff show a good level of awareness of child protection issues and there is a healthy culture in the academy of spotting problems and concerns, and sharing them with appropriate staff.
- The very good communication between the academy and the colleges attended by some for part of the week support the good behaviour, welfare and safety of these students.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is getting better, but requires improvement because too little promotes students' rapid and secure progress yet.
- Too little teaching identifies precisely what students do and do not understand and responds accordingly. Lessons are usually well planned, but teachers do not always explore students' grasp of key ideas before moving on to using techniques which depend upon students' understanding of the basic principles.
- Teachers' expectations are not always high enough. Students themselves say that, quite often, more could be asked of them. When teachers offer good levels of challenge, students can respond well. In one French lesson observed, the pace of learning was controlled skilfully by the teacher; she required rapid and pacy thinking and responses, and students responded well.
- Work given to students does not always match their needs. This is often the case for the more able who do not have enough opportunities to think differently about problems, or have more time to explore a wide range of solutions for themselves. For example, in mathematics, more able students are often asked to move through the same work as other students, but faster, in order to gain access to questions they could usefully have begun with.
- Many teachers have good subject knowledge and this enables them to present ideas interestingly and generate some enthusiasm for learning.
- Feedback to students about their work is improving, especially in Key Stage 3. Older students say that verbal feedback is improving faster and that written feedback remains inconsistent. The use of additional home study is also inconsistent across departments and teachers.
- The quality of teachers' assessments of students' achievements has improved this year. More reliable data are now driving better analyses, and helping teachers to spot earlier groups and individuals who are in danger of underperforming. Some teachers are beginning to use this information well in lesson planning.
- Teaching is stronger in English than in mathematics and science. Literacy is a special focus in the academy and there are good policies and guidelines in place to help students improve their basic skills. Those teachers who address literacy skills consistently and according to academy guidelines are helping to improve standards; some teachers are not yet making a reliable and strong enough contribution.
- The most effective teaching is promoting new learning and, at the same time, successfully tackling a history of previously poor achievement by students. This legacy of poor learning is due to previously weak teaching, and the use of classroom spaces which made teaching and learning very difficult.
- Teachers are giving Year 11 students a lot of extra help to catch up before their examinations this summer. Students are appreciative of the number of after-school opportunities on offer, and attendance at these sessions is good.
- Teaching in many subjects makes a strong contribution to students' cultural, social and spiritual development. There have been a number of opportunities in art recently, including Year 9's visit to the De La Warr Pavilion, a GCSE workshop on masks and disguises led by a visiting artist, and a visit to Brighton

University for talented artists in Year 9 to undertake print work using their specialist facilities. The Christmas Nativity production involved a wide range of students and entertained the local community at various venues. Year 7 students enjoyed their visit to London to see the poppy display at the Tower of London and enjoy a production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement in all year groups is improving, but is not yet good. In Key Stage 4, the effect of previously poor learning on current achievement is still apparent, but the better teaching is helping to address this. Students' achievements in some subjects are improving quite slowly, for example in science, and in design and technology. In Key Stage 3, learning is much more secure and the majority of students are making progress in line with expectations.
- The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grade Cs or better, including in English and mathematics, has fluctuated over the last three years. In 2014 it was close to the national average. In 2014, students' average grade in English was only slightly lower than the national average; the gap was larger in mathematics and was equivalent to nearly half a grade. These differences are projected to decrease slightly for the current Year 11, and bring subsequent year groups more in line with national average standards over the next few years.
- The gaps in the achievement of disadvantaged students compared with others were large in English and mathematics in 2014. In both subjects, disadvantaged students achieved just over a grade below other students in the academy and other students nationally. The academy's analyses of the achievement of current students, based on reliable data, show gaps decreasing as the impact of extra provision funded by the pupil premium begins to make more of a difference.
- Students' literacy skills are improving, but from a low level for some. Wider reading is actively and successfully promoted in Key Stage 3, but less successfully in Key Stage 4. Many students' capacity to write at length is still not good enough. The Year 7 catch-up premium is being used effectively, and there is evidence of its impact in mathematics; there are insufficient data to demonstrate this in English.
- Students with disabilities and those who have special educational needs are making better progress now. This is an area of strength for the academy, and is due to staff having a good understanding of individual students' particular learning needs and there being well-organised specialist provision. This is reflected in the good attendance of this group of students.
- Students in the ASPie make good progress because of the good level of expertise of the staff in the unit. They show care and commitment to the students they support, and have appropriately high expectations of students' academic progress and the development of their social skills.
- The most-able students have not previously made enough progress. The proportions making the progress expected of them in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2014 were just below national averages, but relatively few made good progress to achieve the highest grades at GCSE in these subjects. There is now a better awareness of the needs of this group of students; some teachers are beginning to adapt planning to offer them significantly more challenge in lessons.
- Students are not routinely entered early for GCSE examinations. A few, however, are entered early to take into account their personal circumstances. This decision is always driven by the need to obtain the best outcomes for students and does not compromise the standards achieved. Students in Year 11 who sat the core science examination in their Year 10 were poorly prepared for it. This is expected to have a significant impact on their final science grade.
- Students who attend local colleges for part of the week achieve well in these courses and benefit from the experience. Their other subjects are not affected as the timetable is carefully organised to enable them to enter an appropriate range of GCSE subjects in addition to these vocational qualifications.

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	138895
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	453811

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,162
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tom Attwood
Principal	Heidi Brown
Date of previous school inspection	27–28 February 2013
Telephone number	01424 730722
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