

Kearsley Academy

Springfield Road, Kearsley, Bolton, Lancashire, BL4 8HY

Inspection dates 6–7 May 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 academy trust, governors and Principal are ambitious and determined to maintain the pace of change in this improving school.
- Attainment and progress, overall, have been on an upward trend since soon after the opening of the academy in 2010. Most students make good progress, including in English and mathematics. In 2014, the proportion obtaining five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, was broadly average.
- Leaders and managers of the academy have created a vision that has strongly motivated members of staff and so teaching is improving. In most lessons, teachers have high expectations and this is raising standards.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well. Teachers have good knowledge of what will best support them.
- The pupil premium is used well to support disadvantaged students. Any gaps between their achievement and that of their peers are closing rapidly. In English, they achieved better than other students.
- The most able students receive increasing challenge to achieve the highest GCSE grades and current performance shows improvement over 2014.
- The academy's work in keeping students safe is outstanding. A large majority of students behave well. Students talk enthusiastically about their academy as a family. They say their academy is improving and they feel safe and well cared for.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The curriculum includes many opportunities to broaden students' horizons and assist them to grow in confidence.
- The sixth-form provision is good, with particular success in vocational subjects.
- Parents and staff are confident that the academy is rapidly improving.
- The academy is well led by its Principal, vice-principal and other leaders. There is ample capacity to continue improving.
- The academy trust and governors are meticulous in their oversight of the academy's performance. They check closely that the pace of progress is maintained.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of students making more than expected progress at the end of Year 11 is increasing but it is still not large enough.
- A very small minority of teaching does not consistently provide a level of challenge that enables all students, including the most able, to achieve all that they should.
- A very small minority of students are not fully engaged in their lessons and do not persevere to achieve as well as they should.
- Marking does not provide as much helpful information to students as it could. Students do not always respond to marking as well as they should.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons in all year groups, nine jointly with senior or middle leaders of the academy.
- Inspectors held discussions with members of school staff holding a wide range of responsibilities, including senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors met with three members of the governing body, including the vice-chair, and with a representative of the academy trust of which Kearsley is a member.
- Inspectors examined a full range of academy documentation. This included records of students' achievement, performance management of teachers and safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke informally to students. They met formally with three representative groups and with members of the student council.
- Inspectors considered 43 responses to Parent View and also took account of other surveys of parental opinion undertaken by the academy.

Inspection team

Paul Copping, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Marcia Harding	Additional Inspector
Linda Foley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- A new Principal has been appointed since the last inspection.
- The academy is a member of the Northern Education Trust.
- The academy is much smaller than the typical secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium is much larger than the national average. The pupil premium is the government's additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very small. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is average.
- A very small number of students are placed with one external provider, Raise the Youth, for additional help with their behaviour.
- In 2014, the academy met the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for students' progress and attainment by the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and students' progress even further so that a greater proportion of students make more than expected progress, particularly in English and mathematics, by
 - drawing further on the best practice in the academy so the level of challenge is always high, including for the most able students
 - ensuring that lessons always engage students so that they remain fully on task and produce the best work they can
 - ensuring that marking provides explicit guidance to help students to improve their work and that the response from students to such suggestions is carefully monitored.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The recently appointed Principal leads a committed team who are driving rapid improvement in the academy. They have the whole-hearted support of the academy trust. A learning community has been shaped where high expectations and good behaviour are strongly encouraged. There is a clear and ambitious vision for improvement in the academy. This has been communicated very skilfully to all members of a staff group who are exceptionally unified in working towards shared goals.
- Parents are unequivocal in speaking of rapidly improving standards in all aspects of the work of the academy. Applications for Year 7 places are now three times higher than in the academy's predecessor school.
- The academy has now maintained an upward trend of improvement for several years. Because it succeeded a predecessor school with very low performance and very low student numbers, the improvement path has been a steep challenge but school leaders have met this. The closing of performance gaps between different groups of students is a very strong strand in the academy's work.
- There is a sharp focus on improving the quality of teaching, basing all decisions on accurate and current data about the progress that students are making. The management of teaching includes regular scrutiny of students' work in which all teachers are required to participate. There is a clear and increasingly well-understood culture of a sharing of best practice. While some initiatives are at an early stage and not always consistently applied, they have already begun to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching. The organisation of teachers into groups of three for mutual criticism and support has created an open climate in which constructive criticism has begun to thrive.
- Middle leaders in the academy have responded vigorously to initiatives that give them enhanced roles in improving teaching. They are rigorously held to account and produce regular and detailed reports of the performance of their departments. They are all firm in their commitment to the academy's drive for improvement. They have effective knowledge of students' progress information and the plans derived from this, in the areas for which they are responsible.
- Impressive coaching for teachers in place: there is an absolute requirement that the best teaching practice is shared. Key elements of the system have only been in place since the beginning of the spring term. While practice is not entirely consistent, a trend of improvement is clear.
- The assessment of the quality of teaching is rooted in accurate checking on students' progress. As a result, the Principal has a clear grasp of how different teachers are performing. Good use is made of this information to ensure that teachers only progress on the pay scales in ways justified by the progress of their students are making.
- Leaders have a clear picture of strengths and areas for development. They have detailed plans in place for further improvements. They have identified as a priority the need for even more students to make more than expected progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11. Leaders have also planned for to improve assessment and marking in order to increase the challenge presented to each student whatever their starting point.
- Teachers, aided by frequent and increasingly accurate assessment information, are well informed about students' needs. This underpins the school's success in ensuring that all students have equal opportunity to achieving success.
- The pupil premium funding is used well; gaps between the performance of disadvantaged students and their peers closing. The Year 7 catch-up funding has also been used well to accelerate the progress of those students requiring particular support.
- Careers advice and guidance are delivered effectively. Advice and guidance to students are effective in helping them to make sensible choices about their course options and future destinations. Taking account of the predominance of vocational courses in its own sixth form, along with its small size, the academy ensures that students are well informed about the wide range of post-16 options in local establishments.
- The curriculum is effective. Balance and breadth have been achieved despite the relatively small size of the academy. The large majority of students progress well in their literacy and numeracy and are well prepared for the next steps in their education. Almost all continue into education, training or employment at the end of Year 11.
- The academy's programme for sport is broad and a large number of students take part. In the highly popular cheerleading option, the academy has enjoyed competitive success at a national level. The academy has a full programme of cultural experiences and visits to broaden horizons and to give students a sense of the values of different cultures and faiths. For example, language visits to Spain and history visits to the battlefields of northern France are complimented by exchange visits to a partner school in

Hong Kong. These programmes help any discrimination to be tackled well and equality of opportunity to be effectively promoted. Students are prepared well for life in modern Britain.

- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements. They also include many additional features and ensure safeguarding throughout the academy is outstanding. For example, safeguarding is enhanced to take account of the frequent visits of pupils from partner primary schools to the academy.
- The progress and attendance of the very small number of students who attend alternative provision are carefully monitored. Detailed plans are agreed with the external provider for the improvement of their behaviour and their early full return to the academy.
- The Northern Education Trust provides effective support to the academy. The trust closely monitors standards in the academy and provides detailed advice. Its very high expectations for the quality of safeguarding arrangements have guided the academy in establishing outstanding practice.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. Governors interpret fully the detailed information about the quality of teaching which school leaders provide. They check, through close monitoring, that any advance of teachers up the pay scales is closely linked to the quality of progress their students are achieving. They are well informed about how school leaders tackle any underperformance.
 - Governors have the skills to interpret independently the academy's key performance information. They provide challenge to leaders to ensure that academy targets link to the necessary actions to achieve these.
 - Governors monitor the spending of pupil premium funding with full attention to the data that demonstrate whether the money spent has provided good value in terms of improvements in achievement for disadvantaged students.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- They conduct themselves in a very orderly way around the academy building at all times. They arrive promptly at their lessons and are ready to learn. They are delighted to show their academy to visitors and are unfailingly polite. The facilities of the academy's two-year-old building are respected and the environment is entirely free of litter and graffiti.
- Several students spoke of the academy community as a family and confirmed that older students take a very positive role in looking after younger ones. They did not consider this to be exceptional; it was what they had come to see as usual.
- Racist incidents are extremely rare. Students spoke of having no experience at all of bullying. There was absolute confidence that adults would always be readily to hand and were very capable in resolving any problem that arose.
- In a minority of lessons, where teaching does not gauge the challenge necessary for students at different starting points, a small minority of students become disengaged. As a result, they do not produce either sufficient work or work of good enough quality. A small number of students fail to respond as fully as they should to teachers' marking of their work so do not make the best use of the suggestions for improvement offered to them.
- Attendance has continued to improve and is now close to the national average.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- The academy's systems for ensuring safety are of the highest standard and these are followed meticulously by very well-trained members of staff who also draw, whenever necessary, on outside agencies such as social care.
- Assemblies are of a high standard. They are an effective part of a programme that ensures that students are aware of how to manage risk in a variety of situations, including online. In form periods seen by inspectors, students were guided through structured discussions in which different kinds of risk were evaluated and students had the opportunity to reflect on what they had learned.
- Students have confidence in the approachability and effectiveness of the adults in the school community. Students of all ages say that they feel entirely safe and secure.
- The arrangements to safeguard students and visiting pupils are highly effective.

- Representatives of the academy trust and governors are frequent visitors to the academy and regularly check on the quality of safeguarding.
- The very few students who go to an external provider experience the same high level of care and safety because of frequent and detailed monitoring by the academy.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is rapidly improving. There is a comprehensive programme of training for teachers aimed at improvement. Teachers have regular access to small groups that discuss effective practice as well as weekly, whole-staff coaching. Typically, expectations are high and the teachers' planning for lessons reflects this.
- Writing, reading and mathematical skills are taught well. Students take full advantage of the opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in a range of subjects.
- The teaching of reading is good. The majority of students read fluently and can adapt to different types of reading matter. Sometimes, they are hampered in making the best progress by not reading widely enough outside of school but the academy is vigorously tackling this.
- The teaching of writing is good. As they move through the school, students become more fluent in different styles of writing. Their presentation improves and vocabulary broadens at a good rate. The most able students make discriminating use of punctuation to avoid unnecessary and repetitive vocabulary.
- The teaching of mathematics is good. Enquiry and problem solving are significant features of a number of lessons and these are strongly motivational. Students speak of using the online mathematics programme available to them at any time while away on holiday, so firm a habit has this become.
- Lessons are typically orderly and purposeful with productive relationships. Because of this, students are confident to speak in class, certain they will receive encouragement from other students as well as their teachers.
- Improved assessment in the academy gives teachers more detailed and more accurate knowledge of the needs of each student and allows them to plan more effectively. This is a major factor in the good progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs. In the same way, it underpins the good progress made by disadvantaged students and the most able.
- Increasingly, teachers' marking provides helpful guidance for students on how they can improve their work. This is not consistently the case but rapid improvement is clear. Marking invites responses from students to further deepen their understanding of how to improve but students do not invariably do this.
- In a very small minority of lessons, students do not have sufficient information to allow them to become fully involved in a task. This contributes to the occasional disengagement and unproductive working of a few students.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- There has been a sustained trend of rising achievement since the founding of the academy in 2010. Students start in Year 7 with standards that are typically below average. They now make good progress. In 2012, the proportion of students achieving five good GCSEs was well below the national average. The proportion doing so in 2013 was much improved and, in 2014, the proportion was in line with the national average. The academy's information about students' attainment this year shows that they are currently performing even better.
- The proportion of students making expected progress in English was in line with the national average in 2014. This was an improvement on 2012 and 2013 when the proportion was significantly lower than average. The extent to which students now have the opportunity to write at length in different subjects encourages higher quality writing. Students' writing is increasingly responsive to different audiences and they adapt well to write for different purposes. The proportion of students making more than expected progress in writing continues to rise.
- Progress in mathematics has risen continuously over three years. The proportion of students making expected progress in 2014 was close to the national average.
- The proportions of students making more than expected progress in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11 are increasing. However, they are still not high enough. In both English and mathematics, there are examples of tasks being completed quickly and successfully by some students without extension activities readily available to provide more challenge.

- Students achieve well and make good progress in all subjects. The extent to which practice is shared between departments means that none is significantly lagging behind others. Information and communication technology is used to underpin learning in an effective way in all departments.
- The most able students achieve well overall. Nevertheless, academy leaders recognise that there is more to be done to consistently meet these students' needs and to ensure that they reach the very highest levels they can.
- The small number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as their peers as a result of the effective support they receive.
- Disabled students and students who have special educational needs achieve well because teachers are very attentive to their precise requirements for support and additional guidance.
- Disadvantaged students made good progress in English. In 2014, this was close to that achieved by other students nationally. In the academy, their progress was better than that of other students. Disadvantaged students' current work shows this positive trend of improvement is continuing.
- In mathematics, the progress of disadvantaged students was, overall, below that of other students in the academy and nationally. Gaps in progress have rapidly closed for students of average and below average ability. The small group of most able students were below their peers in the academy and nationally in the rate of progress they made.
- Gaps in the attainment for disadvantaged students are also closing rapidly. At the end of Year 11 in 2014, in English, disadvantaged students were half a GCSE grade behind other students nationally. They were broadly in line with other students in the school, actually achieving a fraction of a grade higher. In mathematics, they were just below one grade behind other students in the academy and just over a half a grade behind other students nationally.
- The academy no longer enters students early for GCSE examinations.
- The very small number of students who attend alternative provision achieve well. They are reintegrated into the academy as quickly as possible.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form is led well. Knowledge among staff of each individual student's personal needs and achievement is comprehensive. Information about students' progress is meticulously collected and used accurately as a guide to plan teaching and advice.
- In common with the rest of the academy, the safety of students is ensured by exceptionally thorough systems which are meticulously maintained by well-trained members of staff.
- The students behave well. They value their place in the sixth form and are eager to learn. They take seriously their senior position in the school and their success as role models is confirmed by many younger members of the school community. This support is not only informal: sixth formers agree to be both learning and behaviour mentors for younger students. They also value the opportunity for work experience in the café run by the academy. This is offered on a fully commercial, paid basis.
- The sixth form has effective tuition for those students who previously failed to achieve a C grade in English or mathematics. This helps students to improve the standards they reach.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. In many lessons, students participate with maturity, debating actively with their teachers, even good-naturedly challenging them by making reference to their own notes. Many classes have very low numbers but teachers have been successful in ensuring that students do not suffer from any lack of dialogue with their peers.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good. The very low numbers taking academic subjects renders it inappropriate to make comparisons but progress on an individual basis is good. Students achieve at a significantly higher level than the national average in vocational subjects. The proportion of students obtaining university places is increasing rapidly.
- The sixth-form curriculum is necessarily restricted in scope because of its small size. Effective advice and guidance direct students impartially to the provider in the area that will best meet their needs post-16.
- Attendance in the sixth form is good.

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	136135
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	462344

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	487
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mick Farley
Headteacher	Suzanne Pountain
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2013
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