

Grace Academy Darlaston

Herberts Park Road, Wednesbury, Darlaston, WS10 8QJ

Inspection dates 20–21 May 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. It is not good because

- In 2014, GCSE results were well below the national average. The proportions of students making good or better progress in mathematics were below the national average.
- Teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure students make sufficient progress, particularly in Key Stage 3 mathematics and science.
- The progress of different groups of students has been variable because teaching has not been consistently good. This includes disabled students and those who have special educational needs, disadvantaged students, those who speak English as an additional language and the most able.
- The accuracy of teachers' assessments of what students can do in Key Stage 3 varies.
- Not all teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are high enough. Teachers are not consistently using assessment information to plan work that challenges and motivates all students.
- Some subject leaders are very new to their posts and lack experience in managing their subjects. They are not yet contributing fully to bringing about improvements in their areas of responsibility.
- Although it is improving, students' achievement in the sixth form is not yet high enough. Until recently, students entering the sixth form have not had enough information to choose courses that are best suited to their interests and abilities. As a result, some students have not completed courses and others have not achieved as well as they should.

The school has the following strengths

- This is an improving school. Determined good leadership by the newly appointed Principal and senior leadership team has been ably supported by skilled direction from the Chief Executive of the Academy Foundation Trust. This is bringing about rapid improvements in teaching and achievement, particularly in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Governors are now much better informed. They have a variety of experience and expertise that they are using increasingly well to challenge senior leaders to improve all aspects of the academy's work.
- Students' behaviour is good. They are friendly and respectful towards adults and each other.
- Good teaching in English has led to good progress across the school. Teaching in mathematics has improved considerably at Key Stage 4.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well through a wide and varied range of subjects. They have access to many after-school clubs and educational visits, and benefit from a well-planned personal and social development programme. Students have a good understanding of modern British values.
- The academy's systems for keeping students safe are rigorous and consistently applied by staff.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 23 lessons to observe the progress and engagement of students. Four of these visits were joint observations with the deputy Principal responsible for managing teaching in the academy.
- Other aspects of the academy day were observed, including an assembly, tutor time, students' behaviour at break, lunchtime and between lessons, and students' arrival and departure from the academy.
- Inspectors reviewed the quality of the work in students' books to judge the effectiveness of marking, the progress of students over time, and the accuracy of the academy's assessment information.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior staff and subject leaders. A discussion took place with three governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. In addition, the lead inspector met with the Chief Executive of the Academy Trust.
- Inspectors spoke with five groups of students formally in meetings and with a number of students informally in lessons and at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 27 parents who responded to the Parent View online questionnaire. They also considered the 56 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents including: the academy's information on students' progress; self-evaluation and improvement plans; checks on the quality of teaching; attendance records and behaviour logs; the governing body minutes; and documents relating to students' safety and the management of teachers' performance.

Inspection team

Ann Behan, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Julie Miriam

Additional Inspector

Graham Tyrer

Additional Inspector

Collette Curtis

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Grace Academy Darlaston is one of three academies sponsored by the Grace Foundation.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- About two thirds of students are of White British heritage. The remainder come from a diverse range of backgrounds.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- The school does not meet 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.
- A group of current Year 11 students were entered for GCSE English literature at the end of Year 10.
- A very small number of students follow alternative full-time courses at Shepwell School, Willenhall. The achievement of this group is not reported in detail in the report because of the low numbers involved.
- There has been a large turnover of teaching staff and the leadership team since the previous inspection. Only one member of the previous senior leadership remains and a new deputy Principal has been in post for 12 months. Out of eight heads of subject, only one remains; the head of science has been in post since September 2014, the head of English since January 2015, and the head of mathematics since April 2015. At present, the Chief Executive of the Academy Trust has been seconded part time to the academy to give support and direction to the new senior leadership team.
- The newly appointed Principal took up post in April this year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that students' achievement accelerates across all subjects in the main school and sixth form, and particularly in Key Stage 3 mathematics and science, by making sure that:
 - all teachers have high expectations and set work that challenges all abilities and groups of students
 - teachers' assessment of students' work at Key Stage 3 is accurate so that work is planned at the right level for different abilities, including the least- and most-able students.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing the skills of subject leaders so that they are able to rigorously monitor work in their areas and challenge any underperformance effectively
 - making sure that assessment of students' progress in Key Stage 3 is rigorous and accurate
 - ensuring that students entering the sixth form are given sufficient information and guidance so they are better able to choose courses that match their interests and abilities.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- In the last nine months, with clear support and guidance from the Chief Executive of the Academy Trust, the newly appointed senior leadership team has put into action policies and systems that are bringing about rapid improvements in teaching and achievement at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They recognise that this success now needs to extend to Key Stage 3.
- The recently appointed Principal, in the very short time he has been in post, has demonstrated an accurate understanding of what needs to happen to raise standards. He provides clear leadership, is highly visible around the building and has already gained the confidence of staff and students. This is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive responses to the staff questionnaires and by the comments made by students to inspectors.
- In the last nine months, procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching have been revised considerably. Systems are more rigorous and robust. They focus on an uncompromising drive to improve the quality of teaching and raise standards of achievement. Regular checks on teaching, supported by well-targeted training, have led to an increase in the proportion of good teaching, particularly in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Leadership of the sixth form has improved significantly in the last nine months and is now good. Students are very pleased with the changes that have happened. They say that teaching is considerably better and the support that they are now receiving to meet targets has increased greatly.
- In 2014, the academy introduced a new performance management system that links the academy's pay policy closely to the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Under this new system, staff do not move onto the next pay level unless they meet exacting targets. Very good support systems for staff who need help are in place, but if improvements are not evident, the Principal and governors are committed to taking decisive action.
- Recently, subject leaders are playing a greater part in checking the quality of teaching and tracking students' achievement in their areas of responsibility. They are clear about what needs to be done and keen to make a difference, but senior leaders are aware that some are new to their posts and lack experience in leadership and management. They are receiving very good support in developing their teaching skills. They work with experienced colleagues in other local schools and undertake a large amount of training provided by the Grace Foundation.
- Staff check closely the progress, behaviour and attendance of the students following courses away from the academy.
- Senior staff have focused on the assessment of students' progress in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, making sure that resources are better targeted and that students' examination results are improved. Substantial moderation and external review has taken place to make sure that assessments are accurate. As a result, leaders are confident about the accuracy of assessment and reliability of students' work, particularly in Years 11, 12 and 13. However, the same rigour has not taken place with Key Stage 3 assessments.
- The academy has revised the use of its additional funding to help disadvantaged students more effectively. There has been a greater emphasis on improving literacy and numeracy, and providing additional one-to-one support for individuals. Extra lessons have been made available after school and at weekends, and additional support courses are provided during school holidays. Current assessment information shows that gaps in attainment and progress between these students and others in the academy are closing.
- The academy has revised the subjects offered in Key Stage 4 for current Year 11 students so that courses better match students' abilities and lead to appropriate academic qualifications. Previously, it entered students for a large number of BTEC courses. This has been detrimental to their opportunities in achieving five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics, particularly for Year 11 students in 2014. The Principal has plans to amend the curriculum further for 2015. The amount of time given to science has been increased, and the type and range of courses at Key Stage 4 has been reviewed. The policy for early entry has been revised, and more time has been provided to promote literacy in Year 7.
- A strong emphasis on raising students' aspirations and awareness of different careers has been built into the personal and social development programme for all year groups. In addition, students receive good careers advice and guidance at the end of Year 11 and Year 13. This helps to prepare them for the next stage of their education, apprenticeships and the workplace. However, in the recent past, Year 11 students have not always been clear about the requirements and commitments needed for some sixth form courses. They have embarked on courses that do not match their interests or abilities so the

proportion staying on from Year 12 to Year 13 has been below the national average.

- The academy emphasises positive relationships based on Christian values. Students learn about different faiths and cultures, how democracy works, and why the rule of law provides both rights and responsibilities to British citizens.
- The curriculum provides strong support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the wide, diverse and plentiful opportunities for students to take part in after-school clubs and educational trips. A very well-planned programme of personal, social and health education is very well led by an assistant Principal.
- The large majority of parents who responded to Parent View, and almost all of those who completed the academy's parental survey, were positive about the work of the academy.
- The Grace Foundation is actively involved in supporting the academy, for example in recruiting staff, providing good-quality training, and brokering support from local outstanding schools. The Chief Executive of the Academy Trust has spent a considerable amount of time in the academy overseeing the establishment of the new senior leadership team. He is set to reduce his day-to-day involvement now the new Principal is in post.
- All statutory child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures are in place, including those for students who are educated off-site. These are closely monitored by senior leaders and effectively implemented by all staff.

■ The governance of the school:

- There has been an external review of governance since the previous inspection. In addition, a skills audit has helped direct the appointment of new governors.
- Governors are now very well informed. They draw on their wide range of experience and differing expertise to challenge senior leaders to do better. They receive good support from the Grace Foundation to aid them in performing their role effectively.
- Governors have a good knowledge of how to use published data to compare the academy's performance with other schools. They have a clear and accurate understanding of how well students are achieving. They check how well disadvantaged students are progressing compared to others in the academy and all students nationally. They look closely at the progress of those students in Year 7 who need additional help in literacy and numeracy.
- Governors are involved fully in the performance management of staff. They are clear that pay progression only occurs when staff meet exacting targets, and are working effectively with the Principal to challenge underperforming staff.
- Governors monitor spending carefully. They are working closely with the academy's sponsors to set a three-year financial plan that takes account of changing student numbers. They check that any additional government funding is used effectively.
- Governors make sure safeguarding procedures are in place and adhered to by staff. Relevant governors have received appropriate training in ensuring students are safe, for example in relation to e-safety, radicalisation and female genital mutilation.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Behaviour has improved significantly over the last 12 months. Students told inspectors that this is because teaching is getting better and there are better support systems to help them in their learning. They say relationships between adults and students in the academy are much better and that most staff apply sanctions and rewards fairly.
- Behaviour around the building is calm and sensible. Students are friendly and respectful towards adults and one another. Students value the new building and there is no graffiti or litter. They are pleased with all the recent improvements and wear their uniform with pride. Sixth form students provide good role models through their positive attitudes and focus on study, and their calm and purposeful behaviour around the academy.
- Attendance has improved, and recent information shows that the number of students who are persistent absentees has reduced. The academy has employed a family liaison officer who works closely with parents and students to raise awareness of the benefits of good attendance, and to give intensive support to families of students with previously high rates of absence.

- School data show that the incidents of unacceptable behaviour are reducing. Fixed-term exclusions have rapidly declined; they have reduced by three quarters from last year.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students say they feel safe and well cared for. They value the advice they receive through assemblies, tutor time and special days devoted to personal and social development about how to stay safe. This includes the careful use of the internet and social media.
- Students are clear about the different forms that bullying can take. They say that bullying is uncommon, incidents of racist and homophobic behaviour are rare, and on the few occasions that they occur, staff are prompt to deal with them. They speak knowledgeably about the need to celebrate different cultures and of British values of tolerance and respect, and understand what constitutes extremist behaviour.
- The academy's systems for health and safety and safeguarding are very thorough, including checks on the suitability of adults applying to work in the school. All staff apply safety procedures consistently well.
- Most parents responding to Parent View felt the school took good care of students.
- The academy closely checks the safety of the students who attend off-site courses.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Not enough teaching is consistently good. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is still too variable, particularly in science and mathematics. As a result, students do not make good enough progress over time.
- In some Key Stage 3 lessons, teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are not high enough. Teachers do not plan and set work to stretch and challenge different groups of students. Consequently, students complete the same work, which is too hard for some and too easy for others, and not all students progress at the rate that they should.
- Teachers' assessment of students' work in their books and the records that they keep on students' progress at Key Stage 3 are inconsistent in science and in mathematics. In some classes, work that is very similar is graded or levelled differently and in some cases, inspectors found these levels to be inaccurate. This means students are not clear about the levels at which they are working and teachers are not setting work that accurately builds on students' prior learning.
- The academy has introduced a whole-school policy for literacy since the previous inspection. There has been a clear focus on improving students' reading skills, with greater emphasis in lessons on allowing time for students to read aloud and silently. In addition, students have more opportunities to practise their writing skills in different subjects. This is bringing about significant improvements in students' literacy skills, especially that of boys, which was an issue at the previous inspection.
- Teaching assistants play a key role in supporting disabled students, those who have special educational needs, those who speak English as an additional language and disadvantaged students. Targeting has recently become more accurate and staff are better deployed. As a result, the students they help are now making at least similar, and sometimes better, progress than their classmates.
- The quality of teaching has improved greatly in Key Stage 4. Teachers use accurate assessments in most lessons to set work that is increasingly challenging for students of different abilities. They use questioning well to check understanding and deepen learning.
- Marking was an issue at the previous inspection. A new marking policy, introduced this year, is having a positive impact on students' learning and progress. Students were quick to tell inspectors that better marking and advice given by teachers is helping them improve their work. However, a few staff are not applying this policy consistently, particularly in science.
- The quality of teaching has also improved in the sixth form. Current assessments and work in books reflects this. However, there are still inconsistencies within and across subjects, particularly at AS level.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the academy with basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics that are typically well below average. The proportion of higher-attaining students is also well below average. In 2014, the proportion of Year 11 students gaining five or more good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, was well below average. This was partly due to the number of students who were following work-related courses that did not count as GCSE grade C qualification. However, it was also because of inconsistencies in teaching.

- In 2014, GCSE results in English were much stronger than in mathematics. The proportion of students who made expected progress in English was average and the proportion who made better than expected progress was above average. However, in mathematics, the proportions making or exceeding expected progress were well below average.
- The academy's assessment information for Year 11 shows that English continues to be strong and progress in mathematics is improving rapidly. This is because teaching has improved, tracking information is used more effectively to identify students who need extra help, and students are receiving better feedback on how to improve their work. In addition, other subjects are now providing courses with qualifications that are more appropriate. Year 11 students are working at broadly average standards, which represents good progress given their starting points.
- Attainment and progress at Key Stage 3, particularly in mathematics and science, is improving but not at the same rate as in Key Stage 4. Not all teachers are tracking students' progress rigorously enough and, as a result, work that is set for some students does not provide enough challenge to make sure they progress as well as they should. This is particularly true for the most-able students.
- The attainment of disadvantaged students is below that of others in the academy and nationally. In 2014, in English, those in Year 11 were around a GCSE grade and a third behind others in the academy and a grade behind students nationally. In mathematics, they were almost two grades behind students in the academy and two and a quarter grades behind students nationally.
- Academy assessments and work seen in books show that the attainment gaps of disadvantaged students in English and mathematics in the current Year 11 are narrowing. In addition, because of improving teaching and better-focused intensive support, their attainment and the progress they make from their starting points are improving across all year groups.
- Students who speak English as an additional language make progress that is in line with others in the academy and in some cases better. This is because of the good additional in-class support they are given.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress that is similar to other students in the academy. In some cases, their progress has been faster this year because of the better, specific and well-targeted help that they receive. They benefit from individual one-to-one teaching and effective in-class support.
- The progress of Year 7 students eligible for additional help with numeracy and literacy as part of the government's 'catch-up' funding is good. The academy's focus on reading and writing across subjects has had a very positive effect on their progress in English. In addition, extra one-to-one and in-class support in English and mathematics is helping these students to narrow the gap between them and their classmates.
- Most-able students have not made the progress that they should because they are not always set challenging work. In 2014 GCSE examinations, not enough reached the higher grades. Current information shows that their progress is improving and more of these students in Year 11 are working at higher levels, particularly in English.
- In the current Year 11, 40 students took GCSE English Literature at the end of Year 10 and all have achieved a grade C or better. The academy's reason for submitting students for early entry is so that they can concentrate more fully on improving their standards in English Language. The new Principal is considering the policy for early entries as part of his curriculum review.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. In 2014, because of the performance of students taking academic courses, the sixth form did not meet the national 16–19 interim minimum standards. Students following work-related courses performed much better than those following academic courses.
- Current information and work seen during the inspection show that progress at A level and work-related courses is improving at a fast rate because teaching is improving. At AS level, although there have been improvements, students' progress is still not consistently good. Disadvantaged students perform similarly to their peers.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving but there is variation in the quality across and within subjects. As a result, students do not make good or better progress in all subjects, particularly at AS level.
- Since the deputy Principal took over leadership of the sixth form 12 months ago, there have been considerable improvements in the way the sixth form is organised and managed. Significant changes to the systems that check students' progress and trigger additional support for any students who fall behind with their work are now in place. The academy has revised the range of courses that are offered so that they better meet the different abilities and interests of students. Many students were quick to tell inspectors that significant improvements have happened this year, that they are more successful in their

learning, and that they are better supported by staff.

- Prior to this year, students have not received enough detail about course requirements and many have embarked on courses in Year 12 that they have not continued in Year 13. In 2013 and 2014, the proportion of students staying on from Year 12 to Year 13 was below the national average. The head of sixth form is now providing more information about course requirements so that students are able to make choices that are better informed. Current academy information indicates that the proportion of Year 12 students intending to continue to Year 13 at the end of this year is higher than previous years.
- Students who enter the sixth form without at least a grade C at GCSE for English or mathematics get extra support to enable them to retake the examinations. The success rate for retakes in English in 2014 was good but low in mathematics. Current information shows that teaching of mathematics is improving and those students retaking the GCSE mathematics examination this year are set to do better.
- Sixth form students' behaviour around the school and their attitudes to learning are very positive, and they provide good role models for younger students. They have many opportunities to take part in a variety of enrichment activities including clubs, education trips in this country and abroad, and work experience.
- Students are encouraged to take on leadership roles within the academy. They carry out duties around the building such as organising prefects at break and lunchtime. They visit primary schools to deliver lessons alongside teachers, and are outstanding ambassadors for the academy. They have many opportunities to take part in business and enterprise activities through the academy sponsors.
- Students spoke with pride about teaching mathematics in local primary schools and taking part in, and winning, a competition linked to dealing in stocks and shares. They also benefit from opportunities to take part in a house-building project in Mexico.
- Students receive good quality careers guidance. The vast majority who complete their courses go on to study at universities of their choice or move on to further study, apprenticeships, training or employment.
- Students receive a wide range of advice and guidance about keeping themselves safe in a variety of situations, such as when using the internet and social media.

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	135956
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	462543

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	678
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Baker
Principal	Carl Salt
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 July 2013
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