

Friars Academy

Friars Close, Wellingborough, NN8 2LA

Inspection dates 4–5 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher, senior leaders and managers provide excellent direction for the academy. They have high expectations and do all that they can to provide the best possible learning opportunities for the students.
- Senior leaders have been successful in improving the quality of teaching and raising achievement since Friars became an academy. They have been well supported in this by the governing body.
- Students achieve exceptionally well. Progress in literacy, numeracy and communication is at least good, and for most students it is outstanding.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding and this enables students to make rapid progress in their learning. Teachers have high expectations and create a very positive atmosphere for learning in their classrooms.
- Students at Key Stage 4 gain a wide range of qualifications and the academy makes sure that they are very well prepared for further education, training or the world of work.
- Provision in the sixth form is outstanding and learning opportunities are matched very closely to the needs of individual students.
- The academy provides students with a wealth of opportunities in physical education and meets with a high level of success in competitive sport. It takes a lead role locally in promoting sporting achievement and has gained prestigious awards for the contribution it makes.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding and they have excellent attitudes to learning. Students are extremely polite and helpful, and enjoy high quality relationships with the staff and with one another.
- Students say that they feel very safe in the academy. This is because there are rigorous procedures in place to make sure that they are kept secure and made aware of how to keep themselves safe.
- The academy provides all its students with high quality guidance and support. This prepares them very well for the future and helps them to work towards their chosen goals.
- The academy has very productive links with other educational establishments, including with other schools in the sixth form consortium. It works closely with a range of businesses and other agencies to extend students' learning experiences.
- Most parents are very satisfied with the academy's work and partnership with parents is good. The academy is working, rightly, to involve parents even more closely in its work.
- While teachers usually plan their lessons in great detail, just occasionally they do not match activities and equipment as closely as they could to the needs of less-able students in science.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 24 lessons. In combination with looking at students' books, talking to them about their work and checking their progress over time, this provided a balance of evidence on teaching and learning. Inspectors looked at lunchtime and playtime arrangements, talked with a group of students and observed an assembly.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers and the key stage leaders. An interview also took place with three representatives of the governing body.
- There were too few responses to the online survey, Parent View, for these to be considered. However, the inspection team took into account the 50 replies to a paper copy of the Ofsted questionnaire distributed by the academy immediately before the inspection. An inspector met with a small number of parents when they brought their children to the academy and the inspection team looked at the findings of the academy's own surveys of parents' and students' view. In addition, inspectors considered the 37 completed staff questionnaires.
- The inspection team observed the academy's work and looked at a range of documentation. This included: the academy's self-evaluation and development plan; records of students' attainment, progress, behaviour and attendance; and systems for protecting and safeguarding students.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Glen Goddard

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Friars converted to an academy on 1 November 2013. When its predecessor school, Friars School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- All the students have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan for either moderate learning difficulties or severe learning difficulties. Increasingly, the academy is admitting students with more complex needs and over half have autistic spectrum disorders.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students eligible for pupil premium funding is well above average. This funding is for students in the care of the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Most students at Key Stage 4 attend alternative providers for part of their education. They spend some of their time at either Northampton College of Further Education, Moulton College or Tresham College.
- The sixth form provides for a small number of students who are not ready to move on at the end of Year 11 because of the severity of their learning difficulties. The academy is part of a sixth form consortium with a group of other Northamptonshire special schools: Billing Brook Special Academy, Greenfields Specialist School for Communication, Northgate School Arts College and Wren Spinney Community Special School. Friars offers sport and leisure and life skills courses; students access a range of other courses and experiences at the other schools.
- The academy was awarded Specialist Sports College status by the Department for Education and it is also the lead school for Northamptonshire in a Youth Sport Trust initiative called Project Ability.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that teachers always provide less-able students with activities and equipment that are precisely matched to the next steps in their learning in science.
- Increase the information provided for parents so that they have a greater understanding of the academy's many strengths and of how to work in even closer partnership to support their children's development.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and other members of the senior team provide excellent leadership. They communicate high expectations to staff and students alike and work continuously to bring about improvement. They have established a culture in which relationships are highly positive, teaching can flourish and students are expected to behave well.
- The restructuring of the senior leadership team has contributed greatly to an increase in the academy's effectiveness. Senior leaders have clearly defined areas of responsibility and they work together extremely well to raise achievement and fine-tune the experiences provided for students. Other teachers with specific roles, such as key stage leaders and subject leaders, also play an important part in the development of the academy. Leaders all have a strong grasp on the academy's priorities and are closely involved in evaluating its work and driving improvements.
- The leadership of teaching is strong and the academy has rigorous systems for managing teachers' performance. Leaders conduct regular checks on teachers' work and provide them with clear information about what is working well and what could be improved. Teachers have very good opportunities to observe one another's teaching and to take part in focused working groups. Leaders carry out careful checks on students' progress to identify those who need extra help, to make sure they all have equal opportunities and to prevent any discrimination.
- The academy plans new developments in great detail. This is evident in the extensive work that has been done to identify how thinking and other important skills can be incorporated into the various topics that take place across the year groups. A great deal of discussion took place amongst the staff, aspects of existing practice were checked in detail and leaders gathered students' views before making decisions about the way ahead.
- The curriculum provides students with a wide range of experiences that are matched closely to their personal and academic needs. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students follow a very personalised programme devised to meet their individual needs and to reflect their hopes for the future. The academy does a great deal to raise students' self-esteem and provides excellent opportunities for them to develop their moral and social awareness. It provides them with a good range of opportunities to learn about other cultures, including through welcoming a range of visitors to the academy.
- The promotion of British values underpins much of the academy's work. It continuously instils in students the importance of being honest, polite and tolerant, and teaches them about the importance of personal values. They learn about democracy and conducted their own election to coincide with the General Election. Students have good opportunities to learn about different ways of life to prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- The academy plans very carefully for the way it uses its pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged students. It has spent its funding to pay for extra support in literacy and numeracy, to purchase electronic tablets for use in class and at home, and to fund drama and music therapy. These and other activities ensure that eligible students achieve as well as their classmates.
- The academy provides high quality advice and guidance to students, and prepares them extremely well at points of transition. For instance, it holds a summer school for students transferring to Friars at the end of Year 6 to boost their literacy and numeracy skills and build their self-confidence. It provides detailed advice for students when they come towards the time of leaving the academy and makes sure that they are very well prepared for the future.
- The academy has very productive links with other educational establishments to meet students' needs, including with other schools in the sixth form consortium. It works closely with a range of businesses and other agencies to extend students' learning experiences and help to prepare them for the world of work.
- The academy plays a key role in ensuring that there are sporting opportunities for disabled young people

and those who have special educational needs across the county. It provides training to schools, individuals and local organisations and establishes and advertises links with multi-sport and sport-specific inclusive clubs. It works with primary, secondary and special schools across the local authority, co-ordinating a wide variety of sports, and providing support, advice and training.

- The academy is constantly working to improve its practice, and it makes regular use of external support through training, coaching and involvement in research projects to improve teaching and learning. As part of its role with the Maplefields Academy Teaching School Alliance, it has taken responsibility for the recruitment and development of Specialist Leaders of Education and National Leaders in Education. It is also working with the East Midlands Teaching Alliance to tackle areas of development in the wider area.
- The academy has exceptionally thorough systems for keeping students safe, and its arrangements meet statutory requirements. It conducts rigorous checks on staff and works closely with other agencies not only to protect students but also to raise their awareness of how to stay safe. The academy is equally thorough in monitoring the progress, attendance and behaviour of students attending alternative provision.
- Nearly all the parents who expressed their views about the academy are very pleased with its work and some wrote glowingly about the effect it has had on their children. Parents are kept well informed through regular newsletters and open evenings and the academy is working to increase their involvement. While partnership with parents is good, the academy does not communicate and celebrate the details of its work as well as it could, for example through its website, in order to engage parents as more active partners.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is effective and the governing body makes a good contribution to the academy's work. There have been a number of changes to the governing body since the school became an academy and new governors have brought increased expertise. Governors visit the academy to gather information for themselves and check progress towards planned developments.
 - The governing body keeps a careful check on spending, including making sure the academy uses its pupil premium funding effectively to support the progress of eligible students. Governors know that data shows the academy is in a strong position and they have a clear knowledge about the quality of teaching. They make sure that the management of teachers' performance meets requirements, that the most effective teachers are rewarded financially and any minor underperformance is tackled. The governing body is ambitious for the academy and provides a good level of challenge for senior leaders.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. They respond exceptionally well to the opportunities the academy provides and apply themselves extremely well in lessons. They concentrate very well and are enthusiastic learners. This was evident in a lesson in Year 8 mathematics lesson when students expressed reluctance to stop for morning break, saying, 'Do we have to stop? We were enjoying that!'
- Students greatly enjoy their time at the academy and develop hugely in confidence as a result of all the support and opportunities it provides. Some of the older students proudly act as ambassadors for the academy but many others in the various year groups demonstrate exemplary behaviour and attitudes. Indeed, as a whole, the students are a credit to the academy: they are exceptionally polite and helpful, and grow into thoughtful young people. The academy's records show that students also behave very well when they attend alternative provision.
- The academy has excellent systems for promoting positive behaviour. The reward system is a key factor in this and students take working for rewards very seriously. They engage in sensible discussions with staff in lessons about how well they have done and whether they have worked as well as they could. Throughout the academy, staff listen to students and value their ideas, and they play an active part through the school council. Attendance is above average for special schools nationally.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Students say that they feel very safe in

the academy and parents believe that their children are well looked after. The academy not only keeps students very safe on the school site, but also when they attend alternative provision. It also provides excellent opportunities for them to learn how to stay safe.

- Students relate very well with one another and they say that there is no bullying. They have a good understanding of different types of bullying and know the importance of taking care when using the internet. They say that any minor disagreements are quickly sorted out and are confident that there will always be a member of staff to help them should they need it.
- The academy's provision for sex education is exemplary. Both boys and girls work with 'virtual babies' (electronic baby simulators that are programmed to cry to express their needs) to learn about the realities of parenthood. Involvement in this project, which lasts for several weeks and includes sleeping in and looking after the 'baby' at night, makes students much more aware of the importance of avoiding teenage pregnancy.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and communicate to students a strong enthusiasm for learning. Classrooms are calm and attractive, and provide a purposeful atmosphere for learning. Staff establish excellent relationships with the students and are highly skilled in managing their behaviour.
- Most lessons are planned in exceptional detail and make clear what is expected of each student, with tasks matched closely to the next steps in their development. Teachers also plan exactly what role teaching assistants will take in the lesson in order to support students' learning so that they are clear about what is expected.
- Teachers make very good use of assessment information and keep detailed records of students' learning. They make sure that students are very clear about what they are meant to learn and devise detailed targets that underpin their academic and personal progress. Where teachers give students a choice about which targets to work towards, they emphasise the importance of choosing challenging targets that will really stretch them.
- The promotion of students' communication skills is a major strength throughout the academy. Students have excellent opportunities to discuss their learning and teachers' skilled questions push them to explain their ideas in detail. Teaching assistants also question students very well to deepen their thinking and check their understanding.
- The teaching of reading and writing is outstanding. Teachers frequently provide opportunities for students to practise and develop their reading skills in lessons across the curriculum, challenging them to read aloud. Topics that combine written work, such as writing in Year 9 about the sensory experiences people would have had during the Blitz, with practical activities bring learning to life. Students' enjoyment in making miniature Anderson shelters as part of this topic was clearly evident in the models displayed around the classroom. The teacher's highly skilled questioning led students to select their vocabulary very carefully, using words such as 'harrowing' and 'petrifying'.
- Teachers throughout the academy have high expectations for students' literacy development at all key stages, they regularly record their work by writing and using information and communication technology. Special events, such as a workshop led by a rap poet, further motivate students' reading and writing. A poetry club has recently been established and students who belong to it were very excited as they prepared to go and meet the author on the first day of the inspection.
- The teaching of mathematics is outstanding. Teachers make very good use of practical equipment to support students' calculation and to help explain new skills. They often demonstrate new work thoroughly on the interactive white boards and provide many opportunities for students to use and test out their knowledge of numbers. The teacher's excellent questions in a mathematics lesson in Year 10 enabled students to explore in detail various number relationships, considering multiples, factors and squares.

- While less-able students make excellent progress in most science lessons because activities are lively and practical, just occasionally, teachers do not choose activities and equipment that are the best possible match to their learning needs. In these instances, the least-able students make less progress than they could in science.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students enter the academy with low prior attainment as a result of their learning difficulties and special educational needs. Achievement is outstanding because a high proportion of students make better than expected progress and in lessons, they frequently make rapid progress in their learning.
- At Key Stage 3, achievement is outstanding in reading and writing and students make at least good progress in mathematics. At Key Stage 4, students achieve exceptionally well in a wide range of subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics. Throughout the academy, students make outstanding progress in developing their communication skills and in personal, social and health education.
- All groups of students achieve extremely well and there is no significant difference between the progress made by boys and girls, by students with moderate learning difficulties, those with severe learning difficulties or with autistic spectrum disorders. Disadvantaged students make as much progress as their classmates and benefit from the carefully planned support provided for them. In 2014, their achievement was similar to that of the rest of the class in English and mathematics. The academy carefully targets its Year 7 Catch-up funding to support learning in literacy and mathematics, and to provide additional equipment and experiences for students.
- At the end of Year 11, students gain a wide range of qualifications. Those with moderate learning difficulties typically gain a number of GCSE passes at grades A* to G in English, mathematics, science, drama, media studies and physical education. In addition, all students gain Entry Level qualifications in a range of subjects, they are successful in tests of their Functional Skills and receive their Aspiration, Inspiration and Motivation (AIM) accreditation in independent living and in developing skills for the workplace. All students went on to college at the end of Year 11 in 2014 or stayed on in the sixth form.
- Students make very good progress in learning about the world of work. Almost all students complete work experience placements at Key Stage 4 and many spend some of their time in college, gaining valuable vocational skills and some additional qualifications. Students also develop enterprise skills and raise money for a boy in Ethiopia by making and selling snacks to the staff and cakes and drinks to members of the public in the academy's coffee shop in Wellingborough.
- Students throughout the academy make outstanding progress in physical education and gain a wide range of skills. Friars has gained the Schools Games Gold Award and its students were named champions at the Great Britain Special Olympics Netball Championships in 2014 and 2015. The academy also recently represented Northamptonshire at the Panathlon Challenge Competition, competing against a number of other local authorities. Involvement in sporting activities contributes a great deal to students' confidence and ability to work as a team, especially for the many older students who train as sports leaders and help with events that are organised for other schools.
- The most-able students achieve exceptionally well. Their books show that they have produced some expressive and personal writing for their GCSE courses, analysed the feelings of the characters in 'Of Mice and Men' and answered comprehension questions on 'Macbeth'. In mathematics, they have covered a wide range of topics, including work on probability and chance, fractions, angles, problem solving and measurement.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The sixth form is led and managed extremely well in order to meet students' individual needs. There is an excellent focus on developing students' basic skills, with regular practice in literacy and numeracy, as well as on promoting the skills they need in preparation for the next stage of their lives.
- The academy is very careful in putting together packages of experience that reflect students' particular

hopes for the future, and it makes sure that they receive high quality advice and guidance about the options open to them. The wide range of opportunities provided through the sixth form consortium and through college links meets students' needs very well. These experiences are supplemented by a variety of other activities that foster their personal and academic development.

- Students make outstanding gains in their learning, and meet with high level of success in their AIM courses and in the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Towards Independence and the Literacy and Numeracy in Everyday Life awards. All students who left the academy in 2014 successfully went on to college placements.
- Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding and teachers plan their lessons very well to match the next steps in students' development. Very focused questioning by teachers and teaching assistants promotes students' communication, speaking and listening, and social skills exceptionally well. Staff provide a careful balance of support and challenge to enable students to achieve as much as possible. Students have regular opportunities to practise their reading and writing and apply their mathematical skills in practical ways, for instance, in learning to use money.
- Students' behaviour and safety are outstanding and they are highly engaged with the activities provided. During the inspection, students spoke with pride and enthusiasm about the experiences they had had at college, learning to use the library and the café. The academy makes sure that students are kept safe but also does all it can to help them to become as confident and independent as possible. It has thorough systems in place for checking their progress and attendance at college and when they spend time at other schools in the sixth form consortium.

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	140277
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	450325

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	143
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	5
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Melvyn Kay
Headteacher	Suzanne Ijewsky
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
Telephone number	01933 304950
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