

# The Academy of Central Bedfordshire

Kingsland Campus, Parkside Drive, Houghton Regis, LU5 5PX  
Church Road, Stotfold, SG5 4NE

**Inspection dates** 16–17 June 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Working in an innovative partnership with the local authority, upper and middle school leaders have established an academy which effectively meets the needs of students. These are students who have been, or are at risk of being, permanently excluded from their mainstream schools.
- The executive headteacher, well supported by leaders across the two academy sites, leads the academy with the knowledge and determination necessary to create bespoke provision which enables students to re-engage with education. Leaders are driving improvements in the quality of teaching and accelerating progress as a result.
- Governors use their knowledge and expertise very effectively to monitor the work of the academy. They challenge leaders effectively, but also provide them with effective advice and guidance.
- The vast majority of students are making expected progress in English and mathematics. This year, all students are on track to achieve functional skills qualifications in these subjects.
- Students say that the academy is making a positive difference to their confidence and to the way they feel about their learning. They say it is helping them to achieve better outcomes than they had previously expected.
- Students make very good progress in the vocational subjects they study because of strong teaching and very well-equipped learning areas. They concentrate on their learning well and present their work with care.
- Students make good progress in improving their behaviour during their time at the academy. They are effectively challenged and supported to understand the consequences of poor behaviour and the benefits of managing their own behaviour positively.
- Students are taught to manage their own safety well. They say they feel safe once they have settled at the academy and that there is very little bullying.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching in core mathematics lessons has been inconsistent because of frequent changes in staffing. As a result, students' work does not show all that they are capable of.
- Delays in leaders receiving information from previous providers about students' needs when they started the academy have prevented some from making rapid progress.
- Staff do not always use the agreed sanctions and rewards for behaviour immediately. Consequently, the poor behaviour of a small minority of students can continue unchecked for too long.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 22 lessons across both the academy sites. They watched practical sessions and in some lessons, looked at students’ work and spoke to them about their learning and their time at the academy. Inspectors joined a staff briefing at the end of the first inspection day.
- Meetings were held with: the executive headteacher, the principal and head of school at Houghton Regis; the Chair of the Governing Body with two other governors; the safeguarding lead with the special educational needs coordinator; the lead for external provision, the lead for behaviour and the lead for attendance; and the English subject leader.
- Telephone conversations were held with the academy’s external consultant, the education adviser from the Department for Education, the assistant director from the local authority and the virtual headteacher for looked-after children.
- An inspector met with two groups of students, one at each site, to talk about their behaviour and learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of school documentation including assessment information, improvement planning, evidence from leaders’ and governors’ monitoring, minutes of governing body meetings, teachers’ planning, safeguarding records and information and behaviour logs.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, for inspectors to take these into account. However, they considered the academy’s own records of engagement with parents and six responses from parents to the inspection questionnaire. They also took account of the 33 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire received from staff.

## Inspection team

Prue Rayner, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Jason Howard

Her Majesty’s Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Academy of Central Bedfordshire is an innovative alternative provision free school which provides education for students in Key Stages 3 and 4 who have been excluded, or who are at risk of exclusion, from their mainstream schools. Typically these students have a poor record of attendance and behaviour at their previous schools, low levels of attainment and poor perceptions of themselves as learners.
- The academy is supported by all of the upper, middle and secondary schools in Central Bedfordshire. Places are currently commissioned on a full-time basis by the local authority and on a part-time basis by the commissioning schools. Full time places will be available to schools from September 2015.
- The Governing Body includes the principals of all the upper schools and representatives of secondary and middle schools in Central Bedfordshire. The local authority works in close partnership with governors and leaders.
- The academy opened on the Houghton Regis site in September 2013 with a student body which had transferred from the pupil referral unit which was based on the same site. This site offers a balance of core subjects including English, mathematics, information technology and vocational options. The Stotfold site opened in purpose-built facilities in September 2014 with similar provision and additional access to outdoor and adventure activities.
- The academy has expanded very rapidly, and more quickly than expected, towards reaching its full capacity of 140 students. During this academic year 90 students have joined the academy at other than the normal entry time and 14 have left. 53 have joined since January.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage; over two-thirds are boys.
- The proportion of students with an education, health and care plan is increasing as the academy identifies the high level of needs some students have once they join the academy. A tenth of students either have plans or have them pending.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (extra funding for students eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority) is above average.
- The executive headteacher is also the headteacher of Oak Bank School, which provides education for students with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The academy uses eight external providers to enhance provision for students. These include Active Support Education, The Seeds of Change, First Place Training, C&G Plastering Academy, KWS Educational Services, Jamrock Academy, Barnfield College and Barnfield Technological Enterprise.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in mathematics by making sure that:
  - the work set in lessons is matched to each student's learning needs
  - teachers' feedback to students about their work helps them understand how to use their new skills and supports them to make the next steps in their learning.
- Ensure all staff use the agreed approaches to manage students' behaviour to best effect by:
  - using rewards and sanctions immediately when behaviour warrants them
  - adapting the approaches used to match individual student's needs.
- Use its strong links with the local authority and its partner schools to increase the speed with which staff meet new students' learning and behavioural needs by:
  - ensuring information about students' learning and behaviour, including about any disabilities or special educational needs, is available before they start at the academy.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher and academy leaders provide calm and purposeful leadership for the academy. Their vision of a more meaningful education and improved life chances for previously disaffected young people has been made real, through strong collaboration with the Chair of the Governing Body, the principals of the mainstream schools (whose students benefit from the academy provision) and the local authority. As a result, teaching is good and students behave well.
- The funding available to establish the academy has been used to create state-of-the-art vocational training facilities. These include hair and beauty salons, MOT-compliant garages, well-equipped construction facilities and commercial catering kitchens; each has its own learning area, and thoughtful displays set out the paths students can follow to achieve success. Students say that these facilities help them feel valued as learners and that they can achieve qualifications that will be useful in finding future careers.
- Leadership responsibilities are effectively delegated to the team of senior leaders. There are agreed plans to develop the breadth of the curriculum and to sharpen the focus on core English and mathematics teaching as the academy reaches its intended size. These moves reflect the ongoing challenge provided by governors and leaders' detailed review of the quality of the academy's work.
- Procedures to track and monitor students' achievement are effective; they are continually reshaped to meet the needs of the rapidly increasing student numbers and to hold teachers to account for the performance of the students they teach. Information about students' progress is used to ensure staff pay awards reflect the difference they make to students' learning and engagement. The academy promotes equality of opportunity for all its students and ensures that discrimination is not tolerated.
- Students' behaviour is monitored in great detail; they understand the system of rewards and sanctions staff use to help them improve their attitudes. On occasion, this system is not used quickly enough to address deteriorating behaviour which then continues for too long. Each student has a key worker who supports their personal development and liaises with their parents or carers to share information about how well they are doing. Parents appreciate this support and benefit from being able to praise as well as understand how to help with their children's behaviour.
- Leaders, including subject leaders, monitor the quality of teaching effectively using a range of information including lesson observations, students' work, their behaviour and the progress they make in their learning. Teachers are provided with training to address the aspects of their work they need to improve. Robust action, well supported by governors, is taken when standards of work do not meet expectations.
- The academy uses the pupil premium effectively to improve the academic progress and the personal development of disadvantaged students. Effective monitoring by the headteacher of the virtual school and her advisers' communication with staff is ensuring that looked after children at risk of permanent exclusion are provided for at the academy. As a result, younger looked after students in particular make good progress in improving their learning and behaviour.
- Safeguarding procedures are rigorous. The academy holds detailed information about the suitability of every member of staff to work with vulnerable young people and effective training equips them to meet the needs of students. Staff are confident in following child protection procedures, understand the risks of child sexual exploitation and are trained to manage extremes of behaviour competently should they occur.
- The special educational needs coordinator, once provided with relevant information, establishes a comprehensive analysis of each student's needs. This gives all staff the knowledge they need to manage students' behaviour and avoid triggering poor behaviour. The delays experienced in obtaining all the relevant information mean that some students start without the most effective provision in place for them. All students are taught and supported in whole-class lessons as much as possible to avoid reinforcing their negative perceptions of themselves as learners.

- The curriculum has been carefully designed to enable students to achieve essential literacy and mathematics qualifications while they also engage in vocational subjects which interest and engage them. This is further enhanced by the extended opportunities, made available through external providers, which are well matched to students' needs. Academy leaders check the progress, attendance and behaviour of students attending alternative provision rigorously.
  - Students are supported in making choices about the wider subjects they study to help them meet the entry requirements for their future education, training and employment. They receive good advice regarding the possible options they have for future careers and are supported by academy staff and external agencies to access these choices.
  - Through a range of activities, for example a mock election, students are taught to understand democracy, to have increasing respect and tolerance for each other and for different cultures, and to realise the impact of their actions on others. As their behaviour improves they are given extra responsibilities and privileges, such as access to the 'level 2 room' equipped with a pool table and other facilities they have helped create. The improvements in their behaviour, engagement in learning and understanding of the risks they face equip them to better manage the next stage in their education and life in modern British society.
  - Leaders carefully draw on the expertise available from the local authority, the school the executive headteacher also leads, and other schools in the local area, to enhance provision, validate assessment and improve the learning of students.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The governing body brings great strength to the leadership of the academy because it includes the principals of the upper schools in Central Bedfordshire, middle school leaders and representation from local businesses which have made contributions to the academy's resources. Officers of the local authority responsible for securing appropriate provision for students excluded from mainstream schools attend meetings. As a result, the work of the academy meets the needs of the most vulnerable students.
  - Key governors oversaw the setting up of the academy because they recognised that the high levels of needs of students within their school communities were not being met. They take rigorous action when necessary to ensure that staff are fulfilling their responsibilities and know that procedures are in place to ensure staff who perform well are rewarded appropriately.
  - Governors visit the academy regularly. They bring significant knowledge and expertise to their roles and use this wisely to monitor the work of the academy and to provide well-informed advice on improvement. For example, they have improved the quality of safeguarding procedures, endorsed the quality of vocational provision and challenged leaders to continue to improve students' attendance. As many are school leaders, they are able to share and use staff expertise to facilitate improvement. For example, the special educational needs coordinator is being seconded from an upper school to ensure teaching meets the needs of all students at the academy.
  - Members of the governing body see that the academy provides value for money by scrutinising the use of the available funds in detail. They know how well the funding for disadvantaged students is used and monitor the impact of the external provision made for students on their engagement and progress.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. In the majority of lessons and around the buildings students show respect for staff and each other. The start and end of the school day are managed well. In vocational lessons in particular, good-humoured relationships build teamwork and students learn to manage when things do not go to plan. From starting points of very low belief in their own learning ability, they develop confidence and become able to celebrate their own and others' successes.
- The very few incidents of challenging behaviour seen during the inspection arose where teachers and students were new and had not fully adjusted to the academy's expectations and policy for managing behaviour. Where these were not put into effect straight away, some poorer behaviour continued for too long before it was addressed. In the majority of lessons students concentrated well, shared their ideas,

and told inspectors that the academy is making 'a big difference' to their progress and their predicted grades.

- Good behaviour is promoted well. High expectations of personal and academic achievement are evident in displays throughout both the academy sites and these help students develop aspirations for their own lives. Students value the rewards they earn through improving their behaviour, particularly when they reach 'level 2' and are given greater freedom to enjoy personal space and recreation facilities.
- In many cases students have not attended school regularly before starting at the academy. Robust procedures are in place to follow up students' absence. These procedures, along with the increased enjoyment they experience because their needs are better met, mean that the attendance of many students is increasing significantly. The proportion of students who are persistently absent is decreasing.

### Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students' welfare is a priority for all staff, who work with determination to help students understand the risks they face and develop their resilience to manage them. They are taught about the risks associated with sexual exploitation, extremism and misuse of the internet.
- The behaviour, attendance and safety of students attending external provision are monitored carefully. Where necessary, leaders take action and change provision if it is not supporting students to make progress in their learning or it is not meeting their needs and aspirations.
- Records of bullying show that incidents have decreased despite the rapid increase in student numbers. Students say there is little bullying, some because there is 'no time for things like that to happen', others because they know it is not acceptable. A student explained how she feels safer at the academy because she is away from the unkind behaviour of peers at her previous school.
- Staff meet with students and their parents or carers prior to the student starting at the academy. This enables them to set out the academy's expectations and to establish a positive approach to engaging new students in their learning. In some instances, because staff have not received information about students' needs and parents are not well informed about the reasons for the change in their child's schooling, these meetings do not fulfil the significant potential they have to ensure students make the best new start possible.
- Relationships with wider agencies involved in students' welfare are strong. This means that the most vulnerable students' needs are monitored appropriately and effective action taken when they are at risk.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers build meaningful relationships with students, which improve from the time they enter the academy. They use the knowledge they develop of students' needs to plan lessons that interest and engage them and to manage their behaviour with care. When students have recently arrived or teachers are new, learning and behaviour in lessons are sometimes not as strong, but secure improvements are made over time.
- Reading is taught well. Teachers keep detailed records of students' strengths and of the aspects of reading they find difficult. Carefully targeted support in the daily reading sessions, often on a one-to-one basis, helps students to make progress in developing skills that will enable them to read accurately.
- In vocational subjects, teachers work closely with students to show them what they are expected to do and to provide support where it is needed. A strength in these lessons is the extent to which students are expected to demonstrate independence in their learning and to take responsibility for the outcomes of their work. Students' work reflects the pride they develop in their achievements and the good quality feedback they receive from their teachers.
- In English lessons, teachers use questions well to encourage students to think carefully and to develop

their use and understanding of the English language. In a Year 10 lesson, thoughtfully chosen photographs of soldiers in the First World War and challenging questions about their content enabled students to make good progress in using similes and adventurous vocabulary to enhance their writing.

- Students are taught to use mathematics well in their vocational learning to calculate such things as the amount of skirting board needed for the perimeter of a room. They also learn to plan and prepare a budget of their expenses. Learning in core mathematics lessons has not been sufficiently challenging for all students because there have been a number of different teachers.
- Students' work is regularly marked according to the academy's policy. There are some very strong examples of students' developing their learning and being helped to address misconceptions through their responses to marking. This is not consistently good, however, particularly in mathematics, although there are some examples students applying their new skills to solve problems as the result of effective feedback from teachers.

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- Almost all students start at the academy with skills and abilities that are below those expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics. Many have poor attitudes to learning because they have not been successful in the past and have not been able to manage their own behaviour.
- Leaders establish a thorough baseline of students' skills and understanding when they start at the academy. Assessment information and students' work show that they make expected progress in mathematics. Changes in teaching mean that students have not been taught to extend their mathematical understanding sufficiently. They do however use their mathematical knowledge well to solve problems in their vocational learning and so develop a good understanding of its importance to their everyday lives and future employment.
- Students' work in English shows they make expected, and where teaching is best, good progress in developing their use of different forms of writing and in their understanding of different texts. The introduction of daily reading is ensuring they have personal reading time during which they are supported to improve their reading skills well. This is because teachers keep very detailed records of the progress they are making. A strength of the academy's work is the attention teachers and instructors in all subjects pay to correcting and improving students' written work and to extending the vocabulary they use.
- Students' coursework shows they pay attention to detail and make very good progress in almost all the vocational subjects they study because they are taught effectively and the excellent facilities give meaning to their learning. Although they make good progress in hospitality and catering, in some folders students' work has not caught up with the quality of their practical achievements.
- All groups of students make similarly good progress. Disadvantaged students make equal, and sometimes better, progress to their peers because the extra funding available to support them is used well to match individual learning and welfare needs. The progress of looked-after children is supported effectively because good relationships are established with their main carers and their studies are well matched to their needs.
- All students in Year 11 are on track to achieve functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics. A small proportion are entered for GCSEs in mathematics and English and are predicted to achieve the higher grades. The number of Level 1 and 2 vocational qualifications that students are on course to achieve has risen dramatically this year. The vast majority of students have secured places for their future education, training or employment.
- Students are well supported to make better progress and extend their learning beyond the opportunities available at the academy. In some instances this provides a higher level of challenge for the most able. Opportunities also extend the breadth of learning. For example, students are entered for qualifications in land-based equine studies, plastering, sports leadership, music technology and eyebrow treatment this year.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139411
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	450041

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy free school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	128
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Nigel Croft
<b>Executive Headteacher</b>	Peter Cohen
<b>Principal</b>	Jeremy Dodd
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 343878
<b>Email address</b>	admin@acb.beds.sch.uk

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