

Folkestone Academy

Academy Lane, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5FP

Inspection dates	20-21 October 2015
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Children make a very strong start in the vibrant Kindergarten and Reception classes.
- The primary academy is led and managed very well. In the secondary phase, improving leadership is leading to improving outcomes.
- Pupils in the Glassworks sixth form centre achieve highly.
- Pupils are looked after well and they mainly feel safe and secure in the academy.
- Teaching is of a consistently high quality in the primary academy and in the sixth form. It is improving well in Years 7 to 11.

- Pupils behave well. They are friendly, polite and ready to learn.
- At all ages, there is an interesting, broad and enticing curriculum which engages pupils. The primary academy and the sixth form evaluate themselves very accurately This supports further improvement.
- The board of trustees has a clear and ambitious vision for the academy which it has steadily brought to fruition.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Despite the clear improvement, teaching is not consistently good in Years 7 to 11. GCSE results improved in 2015 but are not yet good enough.
- The academy's self-evaluation of provision and outcomes in Years 7 to 11 is broadly accurate but lacks sharpness and precision. This leads to slower improvement in this part of the academy.
- The school misses some valuable opportunities for the primary and secondary academies to work together more closely.
- Attendance is below average in the secondary phase and needs some improvement in the primary phase.
- Parents are not universally supportive of the academy. Some parents find the academy difficult to approach.
- The homework policy in the secondary phase is unsustainable.



Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 11 is more consistently good, so that pupils make more rapid progress and GCSE results continue to improve.
- Regain the trust and support of all parents by:
 - proactively ensuring that all parents feel they can approach the school with the confidence that their points of view will be heard and responded to positively
 - reviewing the existing secondary homework policy urgently, in full consultation with parents and pupils, so that it is workable and accepted in the academy community
 - improving further the procedures for encouraging high attendance, in collaboration with families.
- Improve the academy's self-evaluation so that:
 - for Years 7 to 11, strengths and weaknesses are more crisply identified
 - improvement planning can be more sharply targeted.
- Explore further ways in which the primary and secondary academies can work effectively together, using the expertise in both phases to wider effect.



Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is good

- Leaders, trustees and staff show passion and ambition for the academy and all its pupils. They are highly determined to do what they can to improve the life chances of the young people in the area the academy serves. There is clear direction and continuing improvement. However, in the secondary phase, very occasionally staff mentioned to inspectors what they see as adverse circumstances in the lives of pupils as a reason to excuse weaknesses in provision in some GCSE subjects.
- The academy evaluates itself accurately and precisely in the primary phase, including the early years, and in the sixth form. This supports sharp and effective improvement planning in these phases. The written self-evaluation for Years 7 to 11 is lengthy but lacks the same level of precision. This makes very sharply focused improvement work in the secondary phase harder to achieve. However, the secondary headteacher demonstrated more precise evaluation during the inspection. The secondary phase is improving.
- The relatively small proportion of staff who returned questionnaires feel well supported. One summed up the prevailing view, saying, 'Working at the academy is a huge part of my life. I enjoy it very much.' Another staff member commented rightly, 'There's always room for improvement.' Each member of staff's performance is appropriately managed through suitably organised procedures. The academy makes reasonable decisions about pay progression of staff.
- The academy develops its teaching well and imaginatively, across all phases. Teachers are given useful and very practical advice by senior leaders and they appreciate this.
- New staff are inducted well across the academy. In the primary phase in particular, staff who have started this term are already teaching very effectively.
- Middle leaders, responsible for subjects and for special educational needs in the primary or secondary phase, are very dedicated. They promote effective improvement in their phases and teams. The systems for accountability and planning are suitably developed across the academy. These are very highly embedded in the primary academy. Consequently, the primary academy staff who met with inspectors could describe particularly sharply their work and its impact on pupils' learning.
- Senior leaders in the primary and secondary phases meet together often. Both headteachers lead their phases with commitment and success. The secondary headteacher inherited a challenging situation last summer, when the secondary executive principal left suddenly, but he has stepped up willingly to take increased responsibility. He is supported informally and helpfully by the executive principal, primary phase. She is pleased at his openness and willingness to learn in a new situation. The local authority shares this view.
- There are a few other useful links between staff across the academy. Primary and secondary staff have worked well together to develop effective literacy support for pupils in Years 7 and 8. However, shared work of this type is rare. No teaching staff have a formal cross-phase remit.
- Many parents are very happy with the school. One said of their primary child, 'He loves coming here.' Another said that their secondary-aged children had 'made excellent progress', 'gained confidence' and 'feel very safe and look forward to the school day'. But this is not unanimous. Some parents feel unwelcome and not listened to, especially in the secondary phase. One said there is 'a lack of communication from the school leadership'.
- There are strong objections from many parents of secondary-aged pupils about the new homework policy. These are well founded. The secondary academy introduced its new policy very quickly in the summer, without appropriate consultation. It has led to many families feeling that there is little time for anything other than a long school day and homework. They find this unreasonable and unnecessary. The secondary academy is unable to uphold its own policy. The secondary headteacher accepts that the policy was not introduced well and that he misunderstood the potential strength of feeling about it. He recognises that many parents have concluded that he has not listened properly to their concerns.
- Primary and secondary pupils all enjoy a very broad and rich curriculum, supplemented by a wide range of worthwhile additional activities from which they can choose. These include arts activities and competitive sport. In the secondary academy, the range of subject options for GCSE, and at post-16, is very wide, catering for many different needs and interests.
- The academy has useful and constructive relationships with the local authority and with other schools.
- The academy's website is easy to navigate and provides comprehensive information about each of its key



stages and year groups.

■ The academy's pupil premium funding is spent appropriately. The wide range of interventions and initiatives it supports is helping reduce the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and the others. The primary academy spends its sports premium funding well. This has developed the expertise of staff and raised participation levels among its pupils.

■ The governance of the academy

- The academy is governed by a board of trustees. Its members have given distinguished service in many walks of life and consequently have great wisdom and experience to offer. The board is well organised and structured. Each member has a clearly defined role. The trustees have a clear vision for improving the provision in the interests of the community. They have steadily and astutely brought this vision to increasing reality. However, members of the board rely considerably on reports from the senior staff, more than by seeing for themselves what is happening in the academy as it develops and changes day by day. They do not, therefore, always base their thinking and questioning sharply on immediate first-hand information about what is going on in the academy.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Senior staff provide detailed annual safeguarding reports to trustees. The academy has clear and well-organised policies and systems for keeping pupils, of all ages, safe. Members of staff know what to do to safeguard their pupils and report any concerns. They receive regular, appropriate training. Security and access systems around the site are thorough. Adults who work with pupils are properly checked. The academy is clear about its responsibilities with regard to key issues including e-safety, extremism, radicalisation and forced marriage.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

is good

- Across the academy, teachers' lesson planning is careful and lessons are purposeful. Staff are generally calm and give clear explanations. They have good relationships with pupils and, usually, show good subject knowledge. This brings lessons to life.
- In the primary academy, teaching is consistently good. Phonics, reading and writing are particularly well taught.
- The primary staff have worked out carefully the skills that pupils should develop in every subject. This promotes engaging and challenging teaching. For example, Year 3 pupils enjoyed being conductors and performers in a practical music lesson. Nevertheless, academy leaders are not complacent: they know there is room for further improvement. In that lesson, for example, there was scope for pupils to take their musical learning still further than they did in the time available.
- In Years 7 to 11, teaching is improving well. However, there remain inconsistencies. One pupil astutely said that the quality of the lessons sometimes 'depends on the teacher'. Secondary teachers do what the academy policies require of them. They ensure that lessons have clear learning objectives. They set work to meet pupils' different needs. They require pupils to review and evaluate their own learning. However, these things are not done uniformly well.
- In a Year 10 core physical education lesson, for example, girls played basketball while boys played rugby. The girls' teacher required the pupils to spend a long time discussing and writing evaluations of their games in groups, meaning that they only actually played basketball for a short time. The boys played rugby non-stop for an hour, making short verbal evaluations. Both teachers followed the school policy about evaluation but the boys' lesson was notably better.
- The new 'steps to success' assessment system introduced in the secondary academy is useful in structuring lessons. It helps pupils know what they are aiming for. Where teachers use it well, and succinctly, as in many English lessons for example, it helps lead to some very good learning. However, when teachers allow discussion of the steps to success to dominate the lesson, the assessments become less valuable and accurate and can restrict pupils' progress. Too much time is spent on assessment, and too little on the actual teaching and learning.
- Primary-aged pupils know their personal learning targets well. This helps them have high aspiration, knowing what they are aiming for. GCSE pupils also know their grade targets well. These too are useful in raising aspirations.
- In mathematics, the current GCSE targets are very ambitious indeed based on the current standard of pupils' work. Year 11 pupils need to make very fast progress to reach them.
- This is being attempted. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson, the teacher provided work at different levels of difficulty, some of which was at a challenging A*-grade standard, and encouraged pupils to try the harder



- questions. They were willing to do so and answered them accurately. This is an example of how, across the academy, the needs of the most-able pupils are generally well met.
- Some parents are understandably concerned by what they see as discontinuity when some subjects in the secondary academy have been taught by supply teachers. However, the incidence of this is reducing. The secondary academy has recruited many new staff and has new leaders of key departments, where there has been weaker practice, such as science. This is promoting improvement in the teaching of these subjects.
- Pupils receive good written and verbal feedback from staff. In the primary phase, pupils usefully spend the start of their day reviewing their work and responding to the teachers' marking and feedback.
- The academy meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs well. The primary and secondary special educational needs coordinators each plan provision effectively and the pupils concerned progress as well as their peers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils generally feel safe emotionally and physically, across the academy. At appropriate times, they learn effectively about issues such as healthy living, first aid, the effects of smoking and how to deal with stress. The academy's house system usefully inculcates a sense of loyalty and belonging.
- Primary and secondary pupils understand, as appropriate, how to stay safe. They receive regular reminders of fire and road safety, for example. They understand the dangers, as well as the opportunities, of the internet and social media.
- The school's own nurse and police community support officer both have a high profile and are ready to help. In both primary and secondary phases, family liaison officers provide useful well-regarded support. The academy looks outwards to the community: for example, pupils enjoy presenting and working on the community radio station, Academy FM.
- Pupils happily take on various responsibilities across the academy, as peer mentors for example. They are supportive of each other. Older secondary pupils take the time to look after younger pupils when needed.
- The academy offers effective career and personal guidance to pupils, whatever their educational attainment. The proportion of 16-, 17- and 18-year-old pupils who leave the academy without a place in further or higher education, training or suitable employment, is low.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils in all phases is good. Across the academy, pupils arrive in the morning and start their work in an orderly and constructive way. This positive atmosphere and behaviour then continues throughout the day.
- Pupils are keen to learn. They listen respectfully and carefully to their teachers. They concentrate effectively. They work well independently and in groups, including when there is no direct adult supervision. Pupils understand the respective behaviour policies of the primary and secondary academies and, for the most part, adhere to these well. The parents who responded to Parent View, and who met with inspectors, are pleased with behaviour at the academy.
- There is occasional misbehaviour in some lessons, although this is not the norm. Pupils say when it occurs it is dealt with well by teachers and that learning is only very rarely disrupted. Inspection evidence supports this view. A few parents report what they consider to be over-harsh treatment of pupils by some teachers.
- In the secondary academy, an isolation room is attended by pupils if they are not wearing correct uniform, misbehave or do not have their planners. The pupils see this as strict but fair.
- Across the academy, pupils wear their uniforms, physical education kits and business dress smartly and with pride.
- Pupils move around the academy, and play and socialise together thoughtfully and safely. They are friendly and polite, enjoying each other's company. They queue for their lunches patiently and considerately. Some state, politely, that the portions offered are too small.
- Bullying is rare, although there are recorded instances. These are dealt with effectively. In the primary and secondary phases, some pupils are helpfully trained as anti-bullying ambassadors.
- Key British values, such as tolerance and understanding the rule of law, are well encouraged and



- understood by pupils at all levels of the academy. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to use good programmes in one phase elsewhere. For example, some valuable recent work in the primary academy about democracy was not continued or adapted into the secondary academy.
- The rate of attendance in the primary phase is about average. Staff track absence carefully and follow it up with families. Primary pupils entitled to the support of pupil premium funding currently attend well. In the secondary phase, the rate of attendance is below average but shows some improvement this year. House-based staff follow up any concerns about pupils' absence carefully, although some persistent absence stubbornly remains.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusion is high in both primary and secondary academies, but is carefully monitored and is reducing.
- The secondary academy monitors the behaviour, attendance and academic progress of its pupils who attend the Birchwood Pupil Referral Unit assiduously. These pupils generally fare well. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 who attend the academy's own alternative learning centre are cared for and supported well. However, the academy does not show enough urgency in re-integrating these pupils back into mainstream lessons, which is always rightly the aim.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- In all phases, pupils start with attainment which is below average. This is most notable at the start of Year 7.
- At Key Stage 1, in 2015, Year 1 pupils fared well in the phonics screening check, which assesses their ability to link letters and sounds. Results were notably above the national average. Most Year 2 pupils achieved well in their national assessments in reading, writing and mathematics. Girls performed better than boys.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work in the primary phase, and the academy's assessments, shows that pupils make consistently good progress. In Year 1, pupils have made particularly strong improvements in their writing this term, building on their success in the early years. Much of this writing is of a very high standard. The pupils enjoy their learning. For example, Year 6 pupils worked hard and successfully on interesting history project work about the Second World War.
- At Key Stage 2, national assessment results in 2015 continued to improve. In English, pupils attained more highly than the national average and in mathematics in line with the average. They made about the expected progress across the key stage in mathematics but made more than the expected progress in English. Boys made better progress in mathematics than did girls. Disadvantaged pupils fared slightly less well than others.
- At GCSE, in 2014, the school's results fell notably. However, this recovered somewhat in 2015, more so for girls than boys. Current Year 11 pupils are making sound progress towards their ambitious targets. The school anticipates a further small improvement this year. Inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that an improvement is possible.
- Pupils' progress in the academy's weaker GCSE subjects, such as science, mathematics and the humanities, shows clear improvement this term.
- The secondary academy is becoming increasingly sophisticated in the way that it builds quickly on pupils' work in their primary schools. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson, pupils could show how they had developed their previous learning. In English, a joint initiative of the primary and secondary academies means that Year 7 and Year 8 pupils write neatly and correctly and are developing their literacy skills well.
- Staff frequently listen to Year 7 pupils reading. These pupils read to inspectors fluently and confidently with good comprehension. Their parents are pleased with the reading records which come home regularly.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well.
- Pupils are well prepared, at all levels, for the next stage of their education, or next step in life.

Early years provision

is outstanding

■ Leaders and staff in the Kindergarten and Reception show considerable expertise. The headteacher and phase leaders guide and direct the provision clearly. All staff work together very efficiently and imaginatively. They continually make very robust, carefully moderated, assessments of the children's

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needs and interests. These assessments are excellently used to plan interesting, exciting and high-quality learning activities, day by day.

- Phonics (linking letters and sounds) and early writing and mathematics are taught very well.
- The classrooms and outdoor areas are exciting, creatively organised places for young children to learn. Good-quality, carefully chosen resources are readily available for children to choose from, firing their interest and imagination across all areas of learning.
- Consequently, children learn and develop their skills extremely well. They learn to concentrate for extended periods. Expert questioning and teaching by staff enable children to develop their thinking quickly. From their starting points, children make exceptional progress. By the end of Reception, they attain much more highly than the national average. They are fully ready to make the very most of Year 1. There are small achievement gaps, with girls doing better than boys, and children who are considered to be disadvantaged faring slightly less well than others.
- Children behave excellently. They are polite and friendly. They really enjoy discussing and explaining their work. They show great concern for their own and each other's safety and take turns willingly. They are keen to help others. For example, two of them rushed over to help a member of staff who was clearing up a spillage.
- Staff follow up the interests of children well and take opportunities for learning when they come. For example, when a spider appeared, the adult encouraged the children to count its legs and observe it, skilfully linking this to what the children were already learning. This made the children's planned learning even livelier.
- The parents who gave their views to inspectors are understandably very pleased with this provision. They are fully involved in helping assess their children, providing their thoughts and ideas to the staff. They value the home visits made by staff and the ready availability of senior staff, including the primary headteacher and the executive principal.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The sixth form provision, sited in the Glassworks, is well led and managed. It has a clear place within the provision available in the local area. It provides a safe and stimulating environment for its pupils. With good reason, a parent commented, 'The sixth form is a good stepping stone from school to becoming more independent and on to university, college or work.'
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently good. Teachers plan lessons to suit the needs of their pupils well. Lessons are stimulating and demand a lively response from pupils. The helpful feedback staff give to pupils ensures that pupils have a clear idea of how to improve, and teachers take care to deal with pupils' misconceptions swiftly. Teachers give their time freely to support pupils.
- The sixth form offers a wide range of academic A-level and vocational BTEC courses. The vast majority of pupils complete their courses and many go on to apprenticeships or into employment, with increasing numbers going on to attend university.
- As at the 2013 inspection, pupils taking BTEC courses, such as sports studies, business, music, dance and drama do very well. In the A-level courses, relatively few pupils reach the higher grades. However, the academy, with due care, offers these courses to pupils with relatively low GCSE results. Given this, the pupils concerned make good progress.
- Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in the sixth form and achieve well. Pupils who need retakes remain on suitable programmes to help them achieve GCSE grades C in English and mathematics, with higher than national success rates.
- The rugby academy, which is part of the sixth form, provides well for pupils taking Level 2 and Level 3 courses. It offers high aspiration. Some pupils, for example, go on to take sport science at university. Pupils behave in a mature way in the Glassworks, meeting the high expectations of staff. Year 12 pupils attend well, but in Year 13 there is a slightly higher level of absence.
- Pupils are very positive about the guidance and support they receive, which provides well for both their academic and personal needs. Pupils are cared for well. As one put it, 'They notice if you are having a down day.' Full-time guidance mentors are employed for each of Year 12 and Year 13.
- A wide-ranging programme of assemblies, talks, pupil-run clubs and sporting activities provides pupils with opportunities to develop their life skills. It makes a strong contribution to their development.



School details

Unique reference number 135195

Local authority Kent

Inspection number 10005781

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

Type of school All through

School category Academy sponsor-led

Age range of pupils

Gender of pupils

Mixed

Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study

Mixed

programmes

Number of pupils on the school roll 1891

Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study

programmes

Appropriate authority The board of trustees

Chair Sir Roger de Haan

Headteachers Louise Lythgoe (primary); Warren Smith (secondary)

300

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Date of previous inspection 26 June 2013

Information about this school

- This is a very large and oversubscribed sponsored academy, which opened in 2007. It delivers primary and secondary education in new buildings on the same site. This is a non-selective school, within an area which has selective education from age 11. About half of the Year 6 pupils gain grammar school places and do not enter Year 7 at this academy.
- The academy offers early years and post-16 provision. Its large sixth form is on a separate site, known as 'The Glassworks'.
- The primary and secondary parts of the academy are each led by a headteacher. There is also an executive principal in the primary phase, who is a national leader of education. She also works in other schools.
- Most pupils are White British. Few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is about average in the primary phase. It is above average in the secondary phase.
- Similarly, there is about an average proportion of disadvantaged pupils, entitled to additional pupil premium funding, in the primary phase. In the secondary phase, the proportion is notably higher.
- The academy did not meet the government's minimum expectation (the floor standard) for secondary pupils' results and progress in 2014. It did meet the primary floor standard in 2014. Unvalidated results indicate improvement. The academy is likely to meet the floor standards in both phases in 2015.







Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons across all the academy's age groups, some of it jointly with senior leaders. They looked at samples of pupils' work in detail. They heard pupils in Year 2 and Year j7 read.
- Inspectors observed at play and break times, as pupils moved around the academy site and in assemblies, tutorial periods and other activities.
- They held meetings with senior leaders and staff working in all parts of the academy, trustees, a representative of the local authority, parents and pupils of all ages. They took account of the 38 confidential questionnaires received from members of staff.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the academy's strategic planning, minutes of meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour, and records related to pupils' safety and academic progress.
- In addition to meetings and written communications received from parents, the views of parents and carers were considered from the 147 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.

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