

Alcester Academy

Gerard Road, Alcester, Warwickshire B49 6QQ

Inspection dates	21–22 October 2015
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher has established the highest expectations of both staff and pupils. He has united the academy into a community fully focused on learning. As a result, the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement are rising.
- Progress across the academy is good. School information shows that in 2015 pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations rose sharply.
- Governors know the academy intimately and are unrelenting in their drive for improvement. They draw on their professional skills to further its progress.
- The academy provides a wide-ranging programme to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education which is expertly tailored to their prior understanding. Pupils have an excellent appreciation of what it means to be British.
- Pupils are unfailingly polite. Their attitudes to learning are entirely constructive, because they understand how the academy helps to prepare them for their future lives. They are very proud of their academy.
- Leaders and governors check constantly on the effectiveness of all aspects of the academy's work, and act promptly to address any shortcomings.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe, and to teach them how to keep themselves safe, is highly effective. Attendance is high.
- Lessons typically involve mature discussion in which pupils respect and learn from each other's views. Teachers develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills most effectively.
- Work is well planned to build on what pupils already know and understand. Teachers provide additional challenge for those who excel, and support any who are at risk of falling behind.
- Well-planned and varied strategies reflect the academy's commitment to supporting disadvantaged pupils. As a result, these pupils make good progress and are catching up with other pupils.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Links with primary schools are not strong enough to ensure that pupils in Year 7 build well enough on their previous learning.
- Improvements in pupils' progress have not been sustained over time and are not consistently strong in all subjects, especially in Key Stage 3.
- Teachers' marking and feedback does not always help pupils to know specifically what they have to do to improve their work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further increase the progress of pupils in Year 7 by extending the existing work with partner primary schools to minimise the interruption to learning when pupils transfer to the academy.
- Ensure that pupils know what they must do to improve and reach their targets by carefully checking that pupils understand how to improve their work and put this knowledge into practice.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching and the outcomes in all subjects, especially in Key Stage 3, match the high standards evident in more successful areas, by sharing the excellent practice that already exists in the academy.

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher has united the academy, set a clear direction for improvement and greatly increased expectations for what both staff and pupils can achieve. He has ensured that the academic targets set for individual pupils are challenging and understood by staff, pupils and their parents. Information about pupils' progress is analysed rigorously, so that pupils at risk of falling behind can be targeted and staff held to account. The result is a vibrant culture, fully centred on improving teaching and further raising pupils' achievement.
- Leaders' evaluation of the strengths and development needs of the academy is accurate and based on a wide range of evidence. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of the academy's work very well and promptly make any changes they deem to be necessary, for example by holding a 'super learning day' when the normal timetable was suspended to address an aspect of social education.
- Subject and other middle leaders share senior leaders' commitment to the highest standards and appreciate the clarity of purpose and the guidance provided by senior leaders. Subject leaders have specialist expertise and are taking important steps to learn from the very best practice in other schools and to check their judgements about pupils' work.
- Staff, including teachers who are at an early stage of their career, say that training is extremely useful in developing their skills. Leaders have generated a deep interest in how pupils learn best and the ways in which the staff can work as a team to bring this about.
- The academy has rightly placed a particularly high importance on improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. The pupil premium has been effectively spent on additional teaching and mentoring, and all provision is closely coordinated, monitored and evaluated. All members of staff are fully aware of their role in improving the achievement and welfare of disadvantaged pupils and, as a result, gaps between disadvantaged and other pupils are closing.
- The academy's curriculum is broad, balanced and designed to provide pupils with the best opportunities to secure local further education and training. Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, both to study additional subjects and to participate in sporting, creative and recreational activities. The headteacher has managed the reduction in the academy's roll expertly, using the contraction to review what the academy does, and continue only with that which is most effective.
- The academy encourages pupils from Year 8 upwards to have high aspirations and provides detailed impartial advice and guidance as to how their ambitions can be realised. Year 11 pupils explained that work experience had been carefully tailored to their interests. Staff take particular care to provide a higher level of support for disadvantaged pupils and those who are less confident. As a result, almost all pupils find appropriate placements in further education or training.
- The academy's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is outstanding. Timetabled lessons, assemblies, tutor time, 'super learning' days, off-site visits and particular events all make a fully coordinated contribution to pupils' understanding of their responsibilities and opportunities. For example, the academy's presentation of awards was interspersed with items which celebrated the diversity of British culture. Crucially, pupils are able to explain how well their understanding has been developed: one boy in Year 9 talked about how work on Picasso highlighted the similarities between the Spanish Civil War and current conflicts in the Middle East.
- Pupils learn effectively about democracy and citizenship through the opportunity to elect pupil representatives and so influence the running of the academy. Teachers made excellent use of the recent general election to explain the importance of using the vote.
- The academy's arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective and meet statutory requirements. Staff work effectively with parents and react quickly in those circumstances that require the involvement of other agencies. Leaders pay close attention to the learning and welfare of individuals, and provide training to ensure that all staff do the same.
- Staff monitor the progress, behaviour and attendance of pupils attending alternative provision rigorously and frequently, working in conjunction with the area behaviour partnership.
- The academy works with local primary schools to ensure that pupils, especially disabled pupils or pupils who have special educational needs, begin Year 7 confidently. However, links are not sufficiently well developed to ensure that learning progresses smoothly as pupils transfer into the academy.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors have very effective oversight of the academy. They are proud of what the academy has achieved and are striving to do even better.

- Governors ask searching questions about pupils’ attainment, the quality of teaching and standards of behaviour and they take a particular interest in disadvantaged pupils, for example challenging leaders about how all pupils can complete homework that requires online access.
- Governors hold leaders closely to account for the academy’s performance.
- Governors understand the local community well and make sure that the culture of the academy promotes respect for people from differing cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Governors have a strong command of staffing issues. They ensure that the headteacher manages the pay and performance of the staff so that only good teaching is rewarded and weaker performance is tackled effectively. They involve an independent adviser in their management of the headteacher’s performance so that all decisions concerning his role are well founded.
- Governors have a wide-ranging understanding of risk and check that all safeguarding requirements are met. As a result of this, pupils in the academy are safe.
- Governors ensure that the academy works within its budget.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is having a positive impact and helps most pupils make good progress in their learning. While improved since the last inspection, teaching, learning and assessment are not consistently outstanding. There are particular strengths at Key Stage 4.
- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and what they can achieve. They encourage pupils of all abilities to try hard and to persevere to good effect. Teachers use resources well to engage pupils’ interest so that, typically, pupils are enthusiastic about their learning. Many older pupils are self-motivated because they understand the purpose of what they are learning and trust that the teachers will help them to achieve their aims.
- Teachers pay careful attention to pupils’ speaking and listening skills, making sure that pupils give fully articulated and precise answers in class. Pupils are encouraged to ask questions and to challenge each other. At the same time, shown for example in a philosophy lesson on the nature of evil, pupils respect the rules of debate and listen respectfully to opposing views.
- In most subjects, teachers question pupils well to check on progress, to deepen their understanding and to explore with pupils how new ideas relate to existing knowledge. This is particularly strong in English but less so, for example, in music and science.
- Lessons are planned carefully, so that the learning builds on what pupils already know and understand. This includes providing a good, but not always outstanding, level of challenge to pupils, including those in Year 7. A particularly effective example was observed where the most-able pupils in a Year 11 mathematics lesson were made to grapple with demanding questions about simultaneous equations. As a result, they made excellent progress in gaining an understanding of a topic which was new to them.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a detailed understanding of examination requirements. As a result, they provide thorough guidance on how older pupils can fulfil their potential. Teachers insist that pupils throughout the academy use the correct terminology, both in class and in their written work.
- Teachers and leaders effectively develop pupils’ literacy skills. Most teachers give detailed consideration to the purpose of writing and the conventions associated with, for example, a scientific report. However, on some occasions literacy errors made by pupils are not identified by teachers. Numeracy receives precise and consistent attention.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs learn well. Leaders ensure that any barriers to learning are identified and that teachers know how best to support them. Teaching assistants are skilful at identifying those at risk of falling behind and providing support by rephrasing questions or breaking the learning down into smaller steps.
- Teachers mark pupils’ work regularly, providing feedback in a consistent format in accordance with the academy’s policy. However, teachers’ marking and feedback does not always tell pupils clearly and specifically how to improve. As a result, although pupils understand that they need to improve their work, they do not know precisely how to do this.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils feel safe in the academy, and the parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire emphatically agree. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent, and there is an impressive level of trust. The pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed that low-key supervision on the large site was quite sufficient because pupils have no inclination to misbehave.
- Pupils report that incidents of bullying are extremely rare. When such incidents do arise, staff not only provide reassurance for the victim, but work extensively and imaginatively with the perpetrator to ensure that they fully understand the consequences of their actions and how they should behave in future. Pupils are explicitly tolerant.
- The academy teaches pupils how to be safe in many different contexts, including about online safety, the dangers of substance abuse, healthy eating and the importance of sexual health, and issues are often presented in imaginative ways. One pupil told an inspector that an assembly on the responsible use of the internet 'really hit home', while another commented on the power of short dramatic productions by professional actors.
- Pupils are assured and resilient learners, often taking a high level of responsibility for their own progress. They are very proud of the academy. They are fully aware of how their attitudes contribute to their own success and that of others.
- The academy receives daily updates on the attendance of pupils at alternative provision, and any absence is pursued rigorously. Pupils attending the alternative provision are very well supported and benefit from enhanced opportunities for mentoring and careers guidance.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and they approach their work with enthusiasm. They bring the right equipment to lessons, take a pride in their appearance and present their books neatly. Their punctuality is very good. Pupils collaborate effectively when working in pairs or groups, and some take leadership roles in class which assist other pupils with their learning.
- Pupils told inspectors that lessons are only disrupted on very rare occasions and inspection evidence confirmed this.
- The academy carefully records the rare occurrence of poor behaviour. The rate of fixed-term exclusions fell last academic year to below the national average and there has only been one exclusion since September 2015.
- Pupils are unfailingly polite and helpful, treating visitors to the academy with natural courtesy. Their conduct at social times is impeccable and there is no evidence of litter or damage to the fabric of the academy.
- Attendance has historically been average, but it improved steadily last year, and since September 2015 it has been high. The attendance of some groups has risen considerably, including that of disadvantaged pupils, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The attendance of these groups is now in line with that of all pupils nationally.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- As a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' attitudes to their own work, pupils' attainment and progress are rising rapidly and are good.
- Pupils who left the academy in 2014 started with attainment which was a little above average and left with attainment that was average overall. In mathematics, the proportions of pupils who made expected progress and who made more than expected progress were in line with the national average. In English, the proportion who made more than expected progress was also in line with the national average, but the proportion who made expected progress was below average.
- However, unvalidated results supplied by the academy and supported by the provisional release of government information indicate that in 2015, a similar cohort of pupils achieved much better outcomes, with 80% of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs grades A* to C including English and mathematics. The proportions of pupils who made at least expected progress in English and in mathematics also rose to be above the national figures for the previous year.

- Information supplied by the academy and confirmed by inspection evidence indicates that pupils currently in the academy are making good progress, across many subjects and especially in Key Stage 4. However, pupils' progress is not consistently strong across all subjects in Key Stage 3.
- The progress of Year 7 pupils in their learning is interrupted by the transition from their primary school to the academy.
- Disadvantaged pupils left the academy in 2014 on average a grade behind other pupils in English, and a grade and a quarter in mathematics. Compared with pupils nationally, they were just under a grade behind in English, and a grade in mathematics. However, information supplied by the academy indicates that over the last year disadvantaged pupils have made much better progress, so that they are now catching up rapidly with other pupils.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are making progress which is at least good. In Year 7, lower-attaining pupils benefit from the academy's use of catch-up funding to provide an intensive reading programme based on phonics (letters and the sounds they make) and similar support in mathematics. Training has enabled staff to provide activities which are more closely matched to pupils' prior knowledge and understanding.
- Historically, the progress of the most-able pupils has been restricted by work in some subjects which failed to provide sufficient challenge. However, inspectors saw the most-able pupils responding well to work which engaged their interest and curiosity. As a result, they are typically making strong progress.
- Pupils across the academy greatly enjoy reading and use the well-stocked library as an excellent source of fiction books and reference materials. Key Stage 3 pupils report that a commercial scheme which monitors their reading of fiction has motivated them to read more books and so has led to gains in their reading ages.
- Those pupils attending alternative provision make at least expected progress, often from low starting points. All are on track to gain level 1 work-related qualifications which will provide them with access to further courses in their area of interest.

School details

Unique reference number	137172
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection Number	10002465

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	462
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mike Dean
Headteacher	Mr Paul Hyde
Telephone number	01789 762285
Website	www.alcesteracademy.org.uk
Email address	admin@alcesteracademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 September 2013

Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and the number on roll has fallen in recent years.
- The very large majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium, which is the additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care, is below average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of Year 11.
- At Key Stage 4, a very small number of pupils follow work-related courses at Stratford-upon-Avon College for four days each week, and a similarly small number attend alternative provision at Hybrid Arts in Leamington Spa for one day each week. A further very small number attend Stratford-upon-Avon College and Heart of Worcestershire College for three days and one day respectively each week, and Wild Goose Rural Training for one day a week.
- The headteacher was appointed to his post permanently in November 2013. The head of mathematics and the assistant head of mathematics joined the academy in September 2014.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 26 lessons. Nine observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also visited an assembly, tutor time and the library. They observed pupils' conduct during social times.
- The inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, other leaders, class teachers and governors. An inspector met with a representative of the area behaviour partnership to discuss alternative provision.
- Inspectors met with three groups of pupils, including two chosen at random, and spoke with many others informally.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons. They scrutinised in depth a number of exercise books, including some from last academic year. They also looked at information on pupils' targets and current levels of achievement.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, both electronically and on paper. These included development plans and their evaluations; learning plans; past presentations in assemblies; records showing how leaders check on teaching; minutes of governing body meetings; policies; and records showing how the academy supports vulnerable pupils.
- The inspection team took into account the 104 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and the academy's own records of parental opinion. Inspectors also considered the 45 responses to the questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Martin Spoor, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jacqueline Newsome	Ofsted Inspector
Gwendoline Onyon	Ofsted Inspector

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