

Colchester Academy

Hawthorn Avenue, Colchester, Essex CO4 3JL

Inspection dates

8–9 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an academy that requires improvement

- Despite improvements secured to the attainment of pupils at GCSE level in 2015, too many do not make sufficient overall progress from their different starting points.
- The most-able pupils make less progress than similar pupils do nationally because the teaching they receive does not always challenge them to achieve at the highest level.
- Teaching in English does not sufficiently challenge pupils to secure good outcomes. Pupils do not consistently receive helpful or regular feedback in line with the academy's policy.
- Disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs, make slower progress from their different starting points than other pupils nationally.
- Leaders and governors have not secured sufficient consistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Procedures to ensure that looked after children make good progress in their learning are not as rigorous as they should be.

The academy has the following strengths

- Leaders and governors have acted with great determination and energy to successfully improve provision for pupils since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of pupils securing five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C rose significantly in 2015, to around the national average, as a result of improved teaching and rigorous support for pupils.
- In mathematics, a higher proportion of pupils make the expected progress from their starting points than nationally.
- Effective teaching in science and Spanish is engaging pupils and leading to rapid improvements in their achievement.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the academy. Leaders ensure that they are safe; incidents of bullying are rare and very effectively dealt with.
- The Principal is providing strong and inspiring leadership to the academy. In a short period of time she has acted swiftly to raise standards and has identified the correct priorities for further improvements.
- The academy promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain, through both the curriculum provided and the extensive range of clubs and activities on offer.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the academy no longer requires significant improvement.

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, particularly in English, by:
 - ensuring all pupils receive and act upon regular feedback from the teacher, in line with the academy's policy
 - ensuring all teachers plan challenging activities that are matched well to the needs of pupils
 - ensuring teachers communicate clearly and helpfully the steps pupils need to take to improve
 - applying the academy's homework policy consistently to deepen and consolidate knowledge and understanding.
- Improve the overall progress made by pupils by:
 - allocating additional funding and resources more effectively to support disadvantaged pupils, and pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs
 - ensuring that all teachers identify those at risk of falling behind and plan activities that meet their needs
 - providing the most-able pupils with ambitious targets and a wider range of opportunities to develop deeper knowledge and understanding.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - more closely monitoring and evaluating the impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' outcomes, acting swiftly to address areas that require improvement
 - ensuring that middle leaders deliver greater consistency to the planning and assessment of pupils' work
 - sharpening the procedures around ensuring that looked after children make good progress in their learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that their policies around teaching, learning and assessment are being applied consistently enough. Monitoring by middle and senior leaders has not always picked up and addressed the gaps in the application of the assessment and feedback policy in key subject areas such as English; it has also allowed inconsistencies to emerge in the use of 'non-negotiable' features expected in lessons. As a result, the progress being made by pupils in some lessons is not as strong as it should be.
- The most-able pupils have not made the same improvements to their progress that many other pupils have recently enjoyed. Leaders now have plans in place to improve the provision and support for these pupils, but too many lessons currently fail to challenge them or sufficiently develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Leaders carefully track and monitor the allocation of the substantial additional funds they receive to support pupils such as the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding. The impact of actions and strategies to support disadvantaged pupils has been marked in terms of raising their overall attainment to a level much closer to the national average in 2015. However, many disadvantaged pupils still make much slower rates of progress from their different starting points than other pupils, and fewer gains have been secured in improving this aspect of their performance.
- A wide range of support is provided for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Leaders have a good understanding of their needs and communicate these effectively to teachers. As a result, outcomes for these pupils improved markedly in 2015. However, the impact of the teaching and the support provided, as well as the progress being made by these pupils over time, is not monitored and evaluated closely enough. As a result, the provision is not always as effective as it could be.
- The care and welfare of looked after children who attend the academy is effective and well coordinated. Liaison with carers and other agencies is appropriate and regular and they receive good support from designated staff. However, leaders have not acted as rigorously to ensure that the additional funds in place to support these pupils are directed closely and systematically enough to support good learning and academic progress.
- Although there remain important areas that require improvement, the Principal has delivered transformational changes to the academy since her appointment in April 2015. She has quickly won the trust, respect and admiration of pupils, staff, parents and the wider community because she communicates clear ambition and high expectations for the academy. Rapid improvements have been made to standards in many areas, particularly pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, because of the determination and application of clear systems by the Principal and senior leaders.
- The academy's curriculum is well balanced and provides pupils with a good range of subjects and experiences. Changes made recently, such as the addition of Spanish and computing, strengthen the academic offer, while a broad range of practical, creative and vocational subjects prepare pupils well for the next stage of their employment, education or training.
- Opportunities for developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural knowledge and understanding are well embedded in lessons. Pupils gain a good understanding of life in modern Britain through religious education lessons, 'personal guided learning time' and assemblies. Pupils spoke with confidence about recent topics covered, such as human rights, the significance of Remembrance Day and Sikhism.
- Leaders have ensured that a good range of professional development and training opportunities are available to staff. Performance management systems challenge teachers robustly to ensure that they are developing their practice and that pupils make good progress.
- The academy's work to keep pupils safe is systematic and well managed. Staff are trained rigorously in the identification and reporting of risk, including how to protect children from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. The most vulnerable pupils receive close support and the academy's liaison with other agencies is effective.
- Regular contact is made with alternative providers to monitor the progress and well-being of the small number of pupils who attend such provision. The academy monitors their attendance and development appropriately.
- **The governance of the academy**
 - The multi-academy trust that sponsors the academy has acted swiftly to put in place a range of support to leaders and local governors. They have appointed an executive Principal to work alongside

the Principal one day a week, and ensured the effective provision of a range of administrative and financial support that is allowing leaders to focus upon improving teaching and learning as a priority. They also hold challenging and supportive 'rapid improvement group' meetings once a fortnight to monitor progress closely and identify areas for targeted support.

- The local governing body of the academy is a new group, and have only met twice since their formation. However, they have acted swiftly to gain a good understanding of the academy's strengths and priorities for improvement. They have conducted a skills audit to identify their own training and development needs, and have spent time in the academy, visiting lessons and checking on progress for themselves. They possess a good range of knowledge and experience, including in relation to child-protection procedures, and are well placed to provide further support and challenge.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The academy's policy for teaching and learning sets out a series of 'non-negotiable' features that are expected to be implemented by teachers in all lessons. In the most successful lessons, these principles are adhered to and generally result in good progress being made by pupils. However, in some instances they are not consistently followed and, as a result, learning and progress becomes less secure.
- Too many teachers, most notably in English, are not following the academy's assessment and feedback policy. Some pupils are not receiving regular feedback from their teacher, or using that feedback to make improvements to their work. In a number of English lessons, for example, pupils are asked to mark their own work or the work of peers but lack sufficient guidance around how to make that feedback meaningful or accurate.
- Teachers are not all planning to meet the needs of the most-able pupils. In too many lessons, pupils finish work quickly or find the work too easy. Questions and activities do not consistently challenge and engage learners, resulting in wasted or lost learning time and a slow pace to the learning.
- The application of the academy's homework policy is inconsistent among teachers. For example, in Year 10, the amount of homework a pupil receives can vary significantly from one week to the next. As a result, homework is not being consistently used to consolidate or deepen knowledge and understanding.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan exciting activities and to question pupils effectively. For example, in one science lesson, the teacher used searching questions to gauge the levels of understanding and challenge the most able. This, along with regular feedback and a systematic use of homework, was resulting in strong progress being made by all pupils.
- In subject areas such as Spanish, art, music and drama, teachers are planning engaging activities that develop pupils' knowledge and communication skills effectively. For example, in a drama lesson, pupils worked collaboratively to learn about and imagine life in a Brazilian favela. In a different lesson, pupils were skilfully combining drama and IT skills to produce and edit a silent film.
- Mathematics teaching is generally effective in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers effectively model a range of different calculation methods and develop and explore pupils' reasoning skills. In some lessons, planning does not always ensure that the most able are stretched by the work set.
- Initiatives around improving pupils' reading skills are successfully developing a culture of reading in the academy. The library is popular and well resourced. All pupils and staff take part in 'drop everything and read' sessions once a week, and pupils have regular opportunities to read in tutorial periods.
- Teachers communicate well with pupils and have generally high expectations of them in lessons. As a result, pupils commit to their work willingly in the vast majority of lessons and disruption to learning is rare.
- Where teaching is most effective, pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs make secure progress because the teacher plans closely to meet their needs. For example, some teachers or teaching assistants provide helpfully structured resources or reshape questions to meet their needs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe and well looked after in the academy, a confidence that is shared by the vast majority of

parents. The academy buildings are welcoming and secure, with bright displays and media screens that celebrate pupils' achievements, leadership and attendance. Pupils are well supervised and have confidence in the ability of staff to help and support them should they experience any problems. One pupil accurately told inspectors that 'this is a school where you are listened to'.

- Pupils are given a wide range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills and to pursue their interests and passions. In addition to the student council, house and prefect systems, groups and activities, such as the 'eco-reps', the 'sports leaders' programme, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and various performing arts clubs, all work to provide pupils with a wide range of development opportunities.
- Pupils are well informed about how to stay safe online because they are taught about it explicitly in lessons as well as through a well-planned programme of assemblies and talks. They have a clear understanding of the different forms of abuse and bullying, and the academy ensures they are knowledgeable about how to report concerns and keep themselves safe both in the academy and when attending alternative provision.
- The academy has a strong programme of impartial careers advice and guidance. Events take place through the year at which employers and further education and apprenticeship providers contribute to the pupils' understanding of their future career options. Some pupils have the opportunity to take part in work-related learning placements and impartial advice meetings are provided for all pupils.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with robustly. Pupils and the large majority of parents have confidence in the academy's systems to tackle such behaviour; one parent contacted the team explicitly to share their appreciation and praise for the communication and actions taken with their child around such an issue.
- Daily 'personal guided learning time' is built into the school day to allow tutors to work with pupils and monitor their progress. This time is also used to explore a range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural topics. For example, Year 8 pupils had been discussing with great maturity the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, and inspectors saw Year 10 pupils sensitively debating moral questions around the meaning of marriage.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils work willingly and cooperatively in the vast majority of lessons. They are typically supportive and polite and demonstrate good learning behaviours. When the teaching does not challenge pupils sufficiently, their attention can occasionally drift, but disruption to learning is rare and managed by teachers and leaders effectively.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the academy. The transition between lessons is typically smooth and calm. Pupils take pride in the environment; displays and classrooms are kept bright and tidy.
- The academy has dramatically reduced the number of fixed-term exclusions it issues pupils to well below the national average because it has raised expectations around behaviour and improved its systems. Parents and pupils have confidence that behaviour is good, and told inspectors that the consequences for not behaving well were clearly understood, with teachers generally applying the systems consistently.
- The overall attendance of pupils at the academy has improved significantly in the last year and is now around the national average. Similarly, the proportion of pupils that are persistently absent from the academy has reduced to around the national average. Arrangements for tracking attendance to the academy and alternative providers, as well as for supporting families, are robust. The academy has a systematic approach that is improving punctuality in the morning, although a few pupils still arrive late too often.
- Pupils' pride in the academy is demonstrated by their generally smart approach to uniform: blazers are often adorned with various badges to indicate different responsibilities and achievements. Pupils are welcoming to visitors and are enthusiastic when talking about the improvements they have seen take place at the academy in recent years.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- In 2015, the progress across subjects made by the most-able pupils was significantly below that of similar pupils nationally, and the proportion of GCSE grades awarded at grades A or A* was well below the national average. The academy's own performance information indicates that the most-able pupils

currently in Year 11 are making slightly improved progress, but it remains below what is expected of pupils with their higher starting points.

- Disadvantaged pupils make less progress in English and mathematics than other pupils nationally. Although the proportion of disadvantaged pupils making the expected progress from their different starting points is improving, the proportion who make better than expected progress is much lower than other pupils both nationally and in the academy.
- From their different starting points, pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs make less progress than other pupils in the academy. Strong improvements to their progress were secured in 2015 due to a range of support and interventions that have been put in place, but these strategies and the teaching these pupils receive are not currently systematic enough to fully meet their needs.
- In English, pupils do not make enough progress. The proportion of pupils making expected progress remains below average, and the proportion making better than expected progress is well below average. In particular, the most able make very limited progress from their starting points and very few pupils secure the top grades in either GCSE English language or GCSE English literature.
- Achievement in French in 2015 was much lower than the national average, with fewer than half of all pupils securing a C or better at GCSE. The academy has strengthened the teaching of languages and introduced Spanish to the curriculum. As a result, pupils are currently making much stronger progress.
- The overall attainment of pupils improved significantly in 2015. The proportion of pupils who secured five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C is now in line with the national average. Current performance information indicates that these improvements in attainment are generally secure in other year groups.
- Achievement in mathematics is improving overall as a result of more effective teaching. In 2015, a higher overall proportion of pupils made the expected progress from their starting points than nationally, and their overall attainment was in line with the national average.
- Pupils are achieving well in science and art as a result of effective teaching and assessment. In 2015, attainment in these subjects was similar to the national average in terms of the proportion of pupils securing grades A* to C at GCSE.
- In 2015, pupils attending alternative provision made mixed progress reflecting their different starting points and circumstances. The academy tracks the progress made by all pupils currently attending such provision carefully and liaises with the providers appropriately over their curriculum and needs.
- A new system of measuring pupils' achievement over time has recently been introduced at Key Stage 3. Early indications are that it is providing teachers and leaders with useful information to inform planning and to target additional support where it is needed. The academy's performance information shows that similar patterns of stronger achievement in mathematics than in English persist, particularly for the most-able pupils.
- The academy has recently introduced a range of strategies and programmes designed to improve the reading ability of pupils. The early indications are that these programmes of regular reading and targeted teaching of reading are having a positive impact on the measurable reading ages of pupils in Key Stage 3.
- Pupils are well informed about the next stage of their education, training or employment. Very few pupils do not secure further education, training or employment because the academy tracks them closely and works effectively with employers and further education providers to ensure a good programme of impartial information, advice and guidance is in place.

Academy details

Unique reference number	136195
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10008125

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	698
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ruth Gilbert
Principal	Fiona Pierson
Telephone number	01206 861217
Website	www.colchesteracademy.org.uk
Email address	general@colchesteracademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	1–2 July 2014

Information about this academy

- Colchester Academy is a smaller than average-sized secondary academy. It admits pupils aged 11 to 16. The academy opened in September 2010. In April 2015 a multi-academy trust, Bright Tribe, took over the sponsorship of the academy and the new Principal was appointed. A new local governing board has also since been established.
- The academy occupies attractive new buildings that opened in February 2014 and has additional capacity to accommodate up to 1,200 pupils.
- More than half of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium funding (additional government funding to support pupils who are in the care of the local authority or who are known to be eligible for free school meals), which is well above the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.
- The academy uses alternative provision to educate a small proportion of its pupils at Catten College, Colchester Institute, North East Essex Additional Provision School, and Children’s Support Services Centre, Copford.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils in 40 lessons in order to contribute to their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. The majority of these observations were conducted jointly with the Principal or with other members of the academy leadership team and staff from the sponsoring trust. Inspectors also observed intervention, enrichment activities and 'personal guided learning time' taking place.
- Inspectors held meetings with the Principal, executive Principal, the governing body, academy leaders, teachers, support staff, a representative of the sponsoring trust and groups of pupils. A meeting was also held with a parent who visited the academy.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of academy documentation including that relating to: policies, the minutes of governing body meetings, annual review documents, self-evaluation documents, pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance data, and a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 19 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 31 questionnaires returned by academy staff.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with leaders at alternative providers used by the academy to educate a small proportion of their pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised the various forms of communication the academy uses, including the website and information sent to parents and other stakeholders.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Inspection team

Richard Spencer, lead inspector	Seconded Inspector
Beverley Johnston	Ofsted Inspector
Katrina Lambert	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Storey	Ofsted Inspector

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