

Bedford Academy

Mile Road, Bedford, MK42 9TR

Inspection dates

22–23 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Achievement across the academy is improving. Pupils in all year groups are making better than expected progress in many subjects.
- Pupils are making exceptional progress in English from low and often very low starting points.
- The Principal, ably supported by a committed and effective team of senior leaders, has overseen a period of significant change with great skill and commitment. During a time when the number of pupils doubled and almost 70 new staff were appointed, the academy has maintained a good quality of education.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress from their starting points. Gaps in attainment between these pupils and others are narrowing in all years, and have closed in some.
- The sixth form is well led. Pupils are making better progress than before in both academic and vocational courses.
- Pupils behave well in lessons and around the academy. Low-level disruption is uncommon and, where it does occur, is dealt with very well.
- Teachers know their classes well. They plan lessons which challenge the more able and provide support for those who need it.
- Teaching assistants and support staff develop very positive relationships with pupils and make a significant contribution to the academy.
- The academy's ethos, which aims to develop strength of character in all pupils, is at the heart of its success.
- Governors know the academy very well and provide both support and challenge in appropriate measure.
- The academy provides a very high-quality and well-maintained learning environment for pupils.
- Newly qualified teachers are exceptionally well supported.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils are not making as rapid progress in some subjects as in others. Teaching in mathematics, for example, has improved recently and is now consistently good but pupils' achievement is not yet where it should be.
- Teachers' expectations of how pupils present their work are variable. It is too easy to predict the gender of a pupil by looking at their work because boys' handwriting is noticeably worse than that of girls.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the profile of numeracy in a range of subjects, so that pupils have more opportunities to apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum
- Improve boys' presentation and handwriting skills, in particular for pupils in Key Stage 4.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Leaders at all levels are highly effective in driving forward improvements across the academy.
- Very careful and determined leadership ensured that when, in September 2014, over 600 new pupils joined the academy, the impact on learning was limited and these pupils were rapidly assimilated into the academy's unique ethos.
- The Principal's vision, of maximising life-chances for the young people of Bedford, is a striking feature of the academy and underpins many of its successes. Senior and middle leaders provide a very high standard of support in all areas, keeping this vision consistently and evenly applied. As a result, the culture of the academy is one of aspiration and ambition.
- Leaders' strategies to improve the quality of teaching are having a clear impact. Large numbers of new teachers joined the academy when its numbers swelled in 2014. Absorbing the new workforce and new pupils at the same time presented a real challenge for leaders. It is testimony to the effectiveness of the leadership during this period of time that teachers and support staff are overwhelmingly supportive of leaders. Newly qualified teachers are exceptionally positive about the support that they receive in the 'NQT and Beyond' programme. Succession planning is very strong. Senior leaders are preparing and training the academy's future leaders well.
- Academy leaders have implemented a significant change to the Key Stage 4 curriculum based on a successful model in similar academies. The new approach sees pupils in each of Years 9, 10 and 11 undertake two GCSE options in one year. This means that pupils have double the normal number of lessons in each subject and less opportunity to lose motivation, which had previously been the cause of some pupils underachieving.
- The curriculum is very well supported by a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, ranging from golf to mathematics club. These are known as 'enrichments' and every teacher is expected to organise at least one such activity. Pupils are highly appreciative of the range of enrichments. Pupils are encouraged to participate and take-up rates are high. Leaders monitor the outcomes of these activities very carefully, ensuring that they contribute to either the academic or personal development of pupils.
- Last year, 79 pupils were involved in the Year 7 catch-up programme. The additional funding was spent effectively to provide these pupils with high-quality additional tuition. The outcomes for almost all of those involved were positive.
- Improvement planning is very detailed. The academy's plans are well informed by accurate and open self-evaluation. Where things are not as strong as they need to be, leaders are forthright in their drive to make the necessary improvements, placing pupils' entitlement to a high-quality education as the absolute priority.
- British values are very well promoted and form a central theme of the culture of the academy. The values are taught through the PCD (personal character development) programme. Pupils are reflective and are intolerant of discrimination in all of its forms.
- A very small proportion of parents responded to the online questionnaire during the inspection. Of the 21 responses, eight parents said they would not recommend the academy to another parent. Inspectors also took account of the same questionnaire recently issued by the academy, which was responded to by 454 parents. The responses to all questions were overwhelmingly positive, and 96% would recommend the academy.
- A large range of intervention strategies are in place. Leaders monitor the impact of each one with rigour; this informs future planning and spending. Some interventions, in particular those associated with improving literacy for those that need it most, have been highly successful in raising achievement.
- Subject and faculty leaders are increasingly effective. Some are highly experienced and others have only recently been appointed. All are open to bringing successful strategies from inside or outside the academy. For example, the humanities and English departments are working closely together to make sure that both benefit.
- The academy supports all groups of pupils extremely well. Its work to ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted, so that pupils get every chance to succeed, is exemplary.
- Leaders evaluate the quality of teaching very well, and use this to inform a performance management process that rewards the most effective teaching. The Principal oversees this and scrutinises the

recommendations of all line managers to ensure consistency.

- Academy leaders work at a local and national level, using their expertise and experience to support other academies and provide professional development for teachers and leaders.
- Leaders work hard to ensure that the academy is a part of, and relates to, its community. Local shop and business owners have been visited to establish a new line of communication. This means that school leaders are made aware and can celebrate where pupils are positively representing the academy in the community. Additionally, and of great importance, these contacts also provide leaders with information about pupils who may be vulnerable to risks outside the academy.
- **The governance of the school**
 - is well informed about the academy’s strengths and weaknesses because governors receive high-quality information about the academy’s performance
 - is ambitious for the academy and holds senior leaders to account rigorously
 - checks that additional funding, in particular that received for disadvantaged pupils, is spent effectively and is making a difference
 - is a regular presence in the academy. Governors have specific roles and link themselves to key activities. They ensure that they keep themselves up to date through training.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils are listened to and have confidence in academy staff. Staff training is comprehensive and covers a wide range of risks. All staff have undertaken the government’s ‘Prevent’ training which focuses on tackling extremism. The academy takes all forms of risk seriously; during the inspection pupils were discussing the risks associated with Hallowe’en.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Teaching is good and improving in all subjects.
- Lessons are well planned. Teachers use information about their classes to support their planning so that individual needs are taken into account. This is very precise in many cases, with the particular style of questioning that suits a pupil being recorded and used to good effect.
- The specific needs of 11 pupils currently in the nurture group are well met. These pupils receive additional support to enable them to access a full curriculum. The quality of teaching, support and personal development is good for this group. As a result, these pupils are keen to attend and want to do well in the academy. They enjoy very positive relationships with staff and other members of the academy.
- The academy has responded to the removal of National Curriculum levels with a system that uses GCSE grades from Year 7 onwards. Teachers are spending time moderating one another’s work and this is increasing the accuracy of assessment.
- The promotion of the key characteristics of learning, embedded within the curriculum and most lessons, is making a positive difference to pupils’ attitudes towards their work. Many pupils relish the challenge of a difficult problem or a task that will take time to get right. They are less interested in the ‘quick-fix’ approach that they say they used to have.
- The quality of pupils’ presentation is mixed, particularly in Key Stage 4. In many classrooms there are marked differences in the quality of handwriting and the pride in presentation between boys and girls. Inspectors and senior leaders often found identifying the gender of the pupil by the quality of their presentation a simple task. This is certainly not the case in all classes or for all pupils. In some subjects there were no obvious differences; all the work was presented well and with clear pride. This was especially the case in Key Stage 3.
- Interventions to support pupils who are below age-related expectations are very effective. The teaching of phonics and accelerated reading is systematic and well structured. It is tackling low levels of literacy and giving pupils an opportunity to enjoy books and be literate. Teachers in many subjects are identifying errors of punctuation or spelling, and are introducing key words to expand pupils’ awareness of technical and subject-specific language. For example, pupils in physical education (PE) were focusing on the key phrases and words such as ‘spatial awareness’ and ‘stamina’ in their lessons.
- The promotion of numeracy across other subjects has started and is at an early stage of development. Teachers are starting to look for opportunities to promote mathematical skills in a range of subjects and more training for staff is scheduled. The impact of this work has yet to be seen.
- At present, 14 pupils are educated off-site in alternative provision. The academy was subject to a themed monitoring inspection from Ofsted in February 2015 focusing on this aspect of their work. The outcomes

of the inspection were very positive.

- The feedback that pupils receive is often of a good quality. In some subjects, pupils respond to their feedback and the work in their books shows clear signs of improvement as a result. In a small number of classes, however, inspectors found books where the impact of a teacher's marking was less clear and pupils continued to make similar errors despite the teacher identifying them.

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 are very well known by teaching and support staff. Leaders at all levels speak knowledgeably about individual pupils and their challenges.
- The academy places character development as a high priority. Staff model, promote and encourage the key traits such as grit, resilience and curiosity. These are features of many lessons and pupils are able to identify when they need these skills and why they are important.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is structured within the broader curriculum, in citizenship lessons and also within tutor times, where teachers and support staff cover a range of topical and current issues.
- A significant proportion of pupils receive pastoral support and guidance from academy staff. Relationships between support staff and pupils are very positive, and pupils value and trust the help and guidance that they receive. Staff work effectively with external agencies to find the most appropriate support.
- Careers guidance is comprehensive. Two permanent members of staff are employed to support pupils as they make important choices about their future. In much the same way, pupils are well informed about their curricular choices when they are in Year 8. The academy's work in this area is comprehensive; visits to workplaces, universities and careers fairs, supplemented by visitors from businesses, add to the support that is provided.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in the academy. Parents responding to the academy's questionnaire agree. They learn how to keep themselves safe and many say that this has been helpful to them when they are out of school. The dining arrangements in the academy mean that lunch and breakfast times are calm and social occasions. Pupils often make healthy choices from the high standard of food that is prepared in the academy's kitchen.
- Older pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5 regularly provide good role models for younger pupils. They speak freely about how much they value the facilities and how it is everyone's responsibility to keep the academy litter and graffiti free.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Lessons start promptly and are rarely disrupted. Pupils move around the academy in an orderly manner, creating a calm and welcoming environment.
- A new behaviour policy was adopted in December 2014, entitled 'Think Positive'. This approach involves leaders closely monitoring pupils' behaviour and intervening when a negative attitude is spotted. The number of reported behavioural incidents has dropped significantly in response to the new system.
- There are a small number of pupils whose behaviour is not as good as it should be. These pupils receive help and support with making improvements. Some talk very positively about how this help has succeeded in making them better equipped to deal with, for example, their anger management.
- The personal development of pupils who are learning in alternative provision is well monitored. There have been very good outcomes in this respect for the pupils involved, some of whom told inspectors that this experience had positively changed their attitude towards education.
- In the overwhelming majority of cases, the small number of pupils who do not want to learn are supported through the behaviour policy or by senior leaders. On some occasions, teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough. In one lesson, Year 7 pupils were not working hard enough and a very small number were trying to disrupt the learning of others. In this case, the teacher did not respond quickly enough to ensure that all pupils could learn effectively.
- When the academy expanded in 2014 to take in pupils in Years 7 and 8, in addition to those starting

Year 9, standards of behaviour dipped. These pupils were unfamiliar with the academy's high behavioural expectations and the number of fixed-term exclusions rose. This has now fallen again and is currently below the national level for secondary schools.

- Similarly, rates of attendance fell in 2014. These have also recovered and are now in line with national levels. Rates of persistent absence are in line with national averages.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Achievement in all year groups is improving. The most recent examination results show that, from very low starting points, pupils made much more than expected progress in many subjects. In English, art, media studies and religious studies the proportions of pupils gaining grades A* to C matched the national average. The proportion gaining an A* to C grade in other subjects, including mathematics and science, was below the national level. Nonetheless, the progress that pupils made in these subjects represented better than expected progress.
- Assessment information, evidence in lessons and in pupils' work shows that pupils currently in Year 11 are on track to improve upon last year's outcomes by a grade in all subjects. Work to improve the quality of teaching in key subjects, such as mathematics and geography, has been effective in raising achievement. Some subjects, such as sociology, French, English literature, textiles and religious studies are already a grade ahead of last year's final outcomes.
- Achievement in mathematics is improving but is still not as strong as in English. Staffing changes over a two-year period impacted upon the stability of the mathematics department. The teaching team is more settled now and a new leader is in place. Outcomes in Key Stage 3 are improving more rapidly than in Key Stage 4, where the legacy of weaker teaching remains. Assessment data show clear signs of improvement in all year groups.
- In the past, too few pupils have achieved the higher grades of A*, A or B at GCSE. The current Year 11 are on track to reverse this trend, as 44% of all current Year 11 pupils are on track to achieve these grades in English and mathematics.
- Gaps between outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and others are narrowing. The difference between these two groups is much smaller than is the case nationally in English, and is slightly better than the national picture in mathematics. Inspectors sampled and compared the work of several Year 10 pupils from both of these groups and found little difference. In other year groups, and especially in Key Stage 3, the attainment gaps for disadvantaged pupils are either very narrow or have closed.
- Pupils in Years 9 and 10 have already taken some GCSEs. The outcomes were stronger in Year 10 than in Year 9. The academy saw 57% of Year 10 pupils gain a grade C or better in English literature; this is the best result that the academy has achieved in this subject. The current Year 10 pupils are making good progress. Their GCSE results at the end of this year are set to be much stronger than those they took when in Year 9.
- The academy provides significant support for pupils whose reading ages are below their chronological age. This includes intense support for pupils with very low levels of reading. These pupils are taught about letters and the sounds that they make (phonics) and then move on to an accelerated reading programme, which is tailored to match their needs. Pupils are positive about the impact that this has had on their reading, and the academy's assessment information shows that a large proportion of pupils receiving this support make rapid progress.
- The progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs improved significantly in 2015 in English and mathematics. The number of pupils in this group is lower than the national average because the academy does not regard pupils who are behind in their learning as having special needs; these pupils receive additional support so that they can catch up lost ground. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are very well catered for by staff who are well trained and focus on meeting individual pupils' needs. Teaching assistants have developed extremely effective strategies to encourage and support pupils who are sometimes quick to give up when they find the work too hard. 'Don't give up, come on – have another go,' a teaching assistant told one pupil who was struggling with a problem in a statistics lesson. Her manner and approach perfectly suited the pupil who responded very well, showing resilience and determination as he set about the problem once again.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Leadership and management of this provision are good. Leaders have high expectations; the combination of improvements to both academic and vocational provisions, alongside a widening enrichment and tutor programme, have seen numbers and outcomes rise this year.
- Learning is good in lessons because teachers focus on developing pupils' independent working skills. This starts off with a great deal of support at the start of Year 12 and gradually reduces as pupils take more responsibility for their work as they prepare for life beyond the academy. Tasks are often challenging and teachers' expectations are high.
- Pupils entering the sixth form without a level 2 qualification in English or mathematics at GCSE level are well supported through bespoke courses.
- Pupils make good progress from often low starting points. An increasing proportion of pupils are moving on to university.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and is carefully monitored. This allows for rapid intervention where outcomes are in danger of dipping. This is typified by recent changes to the English curriculum when it became clear that pupils' needs were not being best met.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They value the personalised programmes they are provided with. They are equally positive about the guidance they receive about their next steps. Visits and visiting speakers focus on a range of options, including employment, apprenticeships and further education. Pupils currently making applications to university say that they feel very well supported.
- Retention rates between and within Years 12 and 13 are high.
- Provision for pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in Years 12 and 13 is good and is well supported by a highly structured personal development programme. As a result, pupils are very positive ambassadors for the academy and show high levels of social awareness. They attend well and model good attitudes to learning.

School details

Unique reference number	136085
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10005614

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,206
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mervyn Weedon
Principal	Claire Smith
Telephone number	01234 301500
Website	www.bedfordacademy.co.uk
Email address	info@bedfordacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	July 2015

Information about this school

- In September 2014, Bedford Academy altered its age range and took in pupils in Years 7 and 8 for the first time. At this stage, the academy expanded its roll to almost double its previous level. In addition, 69 new members of staff were appointed to the academy.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is significantly greater than the national average.
- Around 60% of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest of these is Bangladeshi.
- Just over one third of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is lower than the national average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards.
- The academy works in partnership with Bedford College, Develop, First Place Training and A4S (Angling for Success) to provide pupils with alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection began as a short inspection for schools judged as good at their previous inspection. After the first day, Her Majesty's Inspectors decided to convert the inspection into a full inspection as there were aspects of the academy's work that needed further scrutiny. On the second day of the inspection, five Ofsted Inspectors joined the existing two Her Majesty's Inspectors to complete the inspection.
- Inspectors observed learning in 45 lessons or parts of lessons. They evaluated pupils' work in lessons and outside them.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, two members of the governing body, departmental leaders and newly qualified teachers to discuss their work. They also met with pupils formally and informally to discuss their experiences in the academy.
- Inspectors took account of 21 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in addition to 454 responses to the same questionnaire issued by the academy in the weeks preceding the inspection.
- Inspectors spent time observing pupils' behaviour in and around the academy, at lunchtimes, tutor times, at the start of the day and during transition between lessons.
- Inspectors evaluated the academy's documentation, including self-evaluation records, improvement planning, assessment information, governors' minutes, and safeguarding systems and records.

Inspection team

Chris Moodie, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Diana Osagie	Ofsted Inspector
Nick Asker	Ofsted Inspector
Paul O'Shea	Ofsted Inspector
David Davies	Ofsted Inspector

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