

Gloucester Academy

Painswick Road, Gloucester GL4 6RN

Inspection dates

16–17 March 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement because in recent years too many have not made the progress expected in all subjects, and particularly in mathematics.
- Examination results in 2015 were particularly weak and reversed an improvement seen in 2014.
- Attendance is now improving but is still too low, especially for a group of pupils who are persistently absent.
- Although improved, the quality of teaching is not yet consistently good across the school.
- The small sixth form offers a limited range of subjects. There is a need to review academic courses so that learners can make good progress from their starting points.
- Teachers do not consistently use assessment information to plan effectively for pupils' progress in their subjects.
- Tasks set for pupils sometimes do not offer the right level of challenge to ensure that they make rapid progress. This is particularly so for disadvantaged pupils and those who are most able.
- When some teachers mark pupils' work they do not consistently follow the school's policy on follow-up and, as a consequence, pupils do not make the improvements needed to make better progress.

The school has the following strengths

- The school's leadership is now good and there is a track record of improvements which demonstrate high capacity for further sustained improvements.
- The relatively new principal has worked tenaciously to eradicate problems, and alongside other leaders and the governing body has raised expectations and generated high ambition across the school.
- The school's membership of the White Horse Federation has provided access to help and support, playing a vital role in raising standards across the school.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are safe, and know how to keep themselves safe.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attendance, particularly for those who are persistently absent, so that it is at least average.
- Improve the quality of teaching further to strengthen pupils' outcomes, by:
 - embedding the best practice and ensuring that all teachers are adept at using information about their pupils' previous learning to plan effectively for progression
 - ensuring that all teachers fully adhere to the school's policy for assessment, and give useful feedback which pupils act on to improve
 - setting tasks which are suitably challenging so that all pupils, particularly the most able and those who are disadvantaged, make rapid progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The current principal took up the post in September 2015. He has brought strong leadership to the school and his high ambitions for pupils have been transmitted throughout the school. Crucially, he has established stability in a school which has had eleven principals and acting principals in less than six years. There has been a transformation of culture through high expectations of leaders and teachers.
- The school's leadership team has been reorganised and much has been done to strengthen the leadership of teaching. There is new leadership of mathematics, secured through the sponsors, and this has had a very positive impact on progress of pupils in the subject. Leadership of the sixth form has also been improved.
- The principal has brought about rapid improvements and has very high expectations of pupils and staff. He has established positive relationships in all parts of the school, lifting the morale and self-confidence of staff and pupils. Standards of teaching and behaviour have improved, and pupils are now making more rapid progress than in recent years.
- The improvements made so far have engendered a desire to improve further throughout the school; there is high capacity for accelerating the rate of progress and the impact on pupils' learning.
- New systems have been introduced throughout the school's staffing structure. All teachers have targets for the progress made by pupils in their classes, and line managers regularly monitor the effectiveness of their work in raising standards for pupils. Underperformance by staff has been tackled robustly.
- Members of staff have been given enhanced opportunities for developing and sharing their skills and knowledge. The school's leadership has encouraged teachers to develop new approaches; staff are confident to share their experiences with colleagues, fostering a collaborative approach.
- The school's leaders are aware that the school's disadvantaged pupils lag far behind other pupils nationally. They have looked carefully at the effective use of pupil premium funding and have comprehensive strategies for bringing about improvements. The leaders are monitoring progress regularly, and the plans are adjusted according to the strength of impact.
- Some changes have already been made to the range of subjects and courses offered in the school's curriculum. Further adjustments are being made to ensure that all pupils will benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum which will prepare them well for the next stage of their lives.
- There is good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Good use is made of assemblies, for example when pupils volunteered to share with others information about their own cultures, by giving a presentation to their peers.
- Staff are regularly trained to protect pupils from all forms of exploitation and this helps to ensure that they are effective in keeping pupils safe.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors provide strong support to the school and also challenge the school to improve further.
 - They gather evidence about the quality of provision by making regular visits to the school. Governors are confident that they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have reviewed and transformed the way they operate, taking advice from the sponsors and other advisers.
 - Governors oversee performance management systems for all teachers and so are contributing strongly to the drive to improve standards.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Throughout the school strong actions are taken to ensure that pupils have a safe environment. All staff have been trained in the government's 'Prevent' duty to combat the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- There is still too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and, as a result, it requires improvement.
- The school's leadership has worked tirelessly and successfully to eliminate all inadequate teaching, which had been a common feature in the past.

- Inspectors found that the variations in teaching quality were not in particular subject areas, or with particular groups of pupils. In the best teaching, information about pupils' previous learning is used to plan activities which deepen and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding, but this is not yet consistent across the school.
- Pupils make most rapid progress when teachers mark their work and give them specific advice about how to improve, in accordance with the school's own policy. Inspectors saw examples where pupils did not act on the advice, or where the advice was not clear to pupils.
- Stronger teaching engages pupils' interest and the activities proceed at a pace which develops and consolidates learning quickly but securely. There is good evidence to show that the school is now giving more emphasis to developing the most-able pupils. For example, Year 10 pupils were observed working at high levels of challenge and aiming for the highest grades in science. Even so, tasks are sometimes not suitably challenging, particularly for the most-able pupils.
- In the past, the weak subject knowledge of some teachers had a detrimental impact on pupils' progress. This issue has now been resolved.
- The school now has tracking systems which help teachers to identify any pupils who are falling behind, and they are then helped to catch up.
- In lessons for older pupils, a lot of attention is given to helping pupils to understand exactly what is required of them in examinations including clear explanation of assessment criteria and how marks are awarded; pupils told inspectors that they found this helpful and reassuring.
- Tasks which pupils complete outside of lessons, including homework, are helping to improve pupils' progress. The school provides pupils with very good access to computers and other resources so that they may complete these tasks after formal lessons finish.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils have a good understanding about what constitutes discriminatory behaviour and bullying. They get on well together. Pupils told inspectors that only very occasionally are there minor problems, which the school deals with quickly and effectively. Pupils and parents confirmed the school's records which show that instances of bullying or prejudiced behaviour are rare
- There is good understanding by pupils of how to keep themselves safe, for example when using the internet. Pupils know how to avoid risks to health such as substance abuse.
- A wide range of activities are available for pupils to participate in: for example on Friday afternoons they can join many clubs which are as diverse as robotics, creative writing and music. They have good opportunities to participate in sport and physical activities and there is a Combined Cadet Force contingent based at the school. Older pupils can participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because a significant proportion do not yet attend school regularly. The school's leaders recognised that in the past attendance was consistently low across the school and much has been done recently to bring about improvements. The school has been successful in improving the attendance of many pupils, but attendance rates are not yet good enough overall. The school is tenaciously targeting actions on a group of pupils who are persistently absent; as yet their attendance has not improved to acceptable levels.
- The school's leadership team has worked diligently with teachers to establish clear expectations about high standards of behaviour. Pupils and staff spoke enthusiastically about positive changes and said that classrooms are now generally calm and orderly. Occasionally, there are instances of low-level disruptive behaviour when pupils are not fully engaged in their learning; this was witnessed by inspectors and spoken about by some pupils.
- Around the school, pupils conduct themselves well: in the corridors, open spaces and dining area there is good order with minimal supervision being necessary.
- The school has worked hard to build pupils' self-confidence and this is prompting a belief in improved opportunities for adult life. Pupils have been encouraged to be organised, with the correct equipment for lessons as a starting point for taking greater responsibility for themselves. This is seen as good practice for adult responsibilities.

- The school has taken action to raise pupils' aspirations about their future careers. All pupils receive advice and guidance through dedicated lesson time, work experience opportunities and visits by employers who talk about the world of work. The advice is balanced and impartial. An increasing proportion of pupils have expressed an intention to transfer through to the school's own sixth form.
- The attendance and behaviour of the few pupils who attend alternative provision is checked carefully to ensure that they are safe. Their personal development and welfare is monitored to ensure that the provision suits their needs.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- In the past, across the school, pupils have made too little progress from their starting points and outcomes have been far below expectations compared with other pupils nationally. Examination results have been poor, especially in mathematics. Examination results in 2015 were extremely weak.
- As a result of the focus on improving behaviour and raising standards of teaching, current pupils in the school are making more rapid progress. This includes pupils in Year 11, although the school acknowledges that the improvements have not been in place for sufficient time to allow all of them to fully catch up by the end of this school year. Current Year 10 pupils are making more rapid progress and the school's data suggests that they will make or exceed the expected rates of progress in English. The school's data also indicates that in mathematics these pupils are catching up, but not yet making the expected rate of progress.
- There are still some variations in the rates of pupils' progress between subjects and year groups. The school is aware of this and careful tracking of pupils' progress is being used to check how well they are doing and helping pupils to catch up if they fall behind.
- Disadvantaged pupils have not been making progress which matches that of other pupils nationally. The school has analysed the effectiveness of its use of additional funding. Some effective adjustments have been made, and these pupils are now making faster progress. The school's tracking data suggests that the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is reducing over time in mathematics, and in English the gap is closing more rapidly.
- The most-able pupils are now being challenged to aspire to the highest grades. The targets for these pupils have been raised and events such as visits to local universities are helping to inspire them.
- There is very effective provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language, including some who are at an early stage of learning English. The expertise of specialist staff is deployed well within classrooms and also a base room.
- The school's actions are giving the pupils a good preparation for the next stage of their lives.

16 to 19 study programmes

require improvement

- The school has a small sixth form which currently offers a limited range of academic and vocational courses. Teachers adapt their practice to be appropriate for small groups of learners. Teachers interact with learners to help them, but opportunities to work with peer learners are limited by the size of the classes.
- Learners' attainment in academic courses has been below that of other learners nationally. The school's assessment data shows that current cohorts are making more rapid progress. Higher grades have been gained in vocational (work related) courses and demonstrate that better progress was made by learners following these courses.
- All learners in the sixth form take a blended mixture of academic and vocational courses. They also participate in broad programmes to support their personal development and prepare them for the next stages of their careers. All learners have appropriate opportunities for work experience; for example one learner explained to an inspector how she had benefited from a regular weekly placement with a local architect's practice.
- The head of sixth form is effective in ensuring that all learners receive highly personalised advice and structured programmes before and during this stage of their education. The school now tracks learners' progress carefully and makes great efforts to ensure that they are well supported to gain access to the next stage of their training or education. An increasing proportion of learners are receiving offers of places in higher education establishments.

- The sixth form is still relatively new, and is now in its third year. The school's records show retention of pupils on their chosen courses has been good, but at the time of the inspection national comparisons were not available.
- The school has been successful in raising the attainment in English of learners who have not previously gained at least a C grade in the GCSE. There has been less success in securing the same good progress in mathematics.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 136199 |
| Local authority | Gloucestershire |
| Inspection number | 10008514 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| 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 | 781 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 56 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Lauren Costello |
| Principal | Ian Frost |
| Telephone number | 01452 428800 |
| Website | www.gloucesteracademy.com |
| Email address | info@gloucesteracademy.com |
| Date of previous inspection | 1–2 April 2014 |

Information about this school

- Gloucester Academy is a smaller-than-average secondary school.
- There are about twice as many boys as girls at the school.
- There has been a change of sponsorship since the last inspection. The school is currently receiving support through the White Horse Federation. This allows the school to access support in a variety of ways, and also encourages the school to share its good practice collaboratively.
- Since the last inspection there have been many changes to the school's leadership. The previous principal left after less than five terms at the school, and then the school was led by an interim principal. The current principal took up his post on 1 September 2015.
- There have been changes the membership of the school's governing body, including the chair, since the last inspection.
- Over half the pupils are entitled to support through the pupil premium funding, which is well above the national average. This is additional government funding to support pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above the national average.
- The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is above the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- A small number of pupils attend Gloucester College on a part-time basis to attend work-based (vocational) courses. Small numbers of pupils receive a part of their education at Peak Academy, Gloucestershire; Bridge Training, Gloucester; and Prospect Training Services, Gloucester.

- In 2014 the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. At the time of the inspection, the floor standards for 2015 had not been published.
- The school was last inspected in April 2014 and judged to have serious weaknesses. Since that time it has received five monitoring visits from Her Majesty's Inspectors. These were carried out in July 2014, November 2014, February 2015, June 2015 and November 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in parts of lessons across a wide range of subjects and all year groups in the school. Many lessons were observed jointly with leaders from the school or the sponsor body. Inspectors also made short visits to tutorial sessions. During lessons, inspectors looked carefully at the quality of pupils' work and the accuracy of the school's assessment information.
- Discussions took place with the principal, other leaders in the school, various members of staff and three governors. Inspectors also had meetings with senior leaders from the White Horse Federation which sponsors the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, minutes of meetings, external reviews and reports, records of leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, assessment and tracking information for current pupils, and behaviour and attendance data.
- Inspectors spoke to many pupils of various ages about their experience at the school. This was done through meetings, but also by having informal conversations around the school at lunchtime and lesson changeovers. Discussions included checking that all pupils feel safe and secure in the school.
- One inspector listened to some younger pupils reading aloud to check how their skills are developing.
- The views of parents were gathered using Parent View (Ofsted's online survey) to which 14 parents contributed. A letter from a parent was also taken into account.
- The school had very recently carried out a survey of its staff and inspectors looked at the responses made by 24 members of staff.

Inspection team

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