

# The ACE Academy

Alexandra Road, Tipton, West Midlands DY4 7NR

## Inspection dates

17–18 January 2017

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an inadequate school

- Leaders, including the Education Central Trust and governors, have not taken the urgent action required to address weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. The school has failed too many of its pupils.
- Achievement at key stages 3 and 4 is inadequate. Pupils across the school, including boys, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and the most able, make exceptionally slow progress from their starting points. This is in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science.
- Much teaching at key stages 3 and 4 is ineffective. It is poorly planned, and fails to engage pupils and meet their needs. Teachers do not routinely follow school policies.
- Behaviour is inadequate. Pupils say they feel unsafe and their learning is too often disrupted by poor behaviour in lessons.
- Many pupils say bullying is not always dealt with effectively by teachers.
- Attendance is too low and the number of pupils who are persistently absent is too high. The proportion of pupils excluded for poor behaviour is high.
- Leaders have an inaccurate and overgenerous view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Planning to improve performance lacks precision and evaluation. There have not been enough improvements in teaching, achievement or behaviour since the last inspection.

### The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher, who joined in September, has the confidence of staff, governors and many pupils.
- The sixth-form provision now better matches the needs of students.
- Pupils appreciate the support they receive in making choices about future careers. The overwhelming majority of pupils move on to education, employment or training when they leave school.

## Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently act to develop a culture of safeguarding in the school through improving pupils' behaviour and attendance by ensuring that:
  - teachers set activities which motivate pupils in their learning
  - all teachers improve pupils' behaviour by consistently following the school's behaviour policy
  - leaders monitor closely the effectiveness of strategies to improve pupils' behaviour and attendance, particularly for those pupils who have received more than one fixed-term exclusion and/or have regular periods of absence.
  
- Improve the quality of teaching so that achievement of pupils, especially at key stages 3 and 4, accelerates rapidly, by:
  - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
  - ensuring that teachers plan lessons where learning is engaging, effective and prepares pupils for the new and more demanding GCSEs
  - ensuring that teachers use assessment information to set work which matches pupils' needs.
  
- Improve the impact of leadership at all levels in driving improvements, by:
  - ensuring that all leaders are quick to tackle any underperformance in their areas of responsibility, especially in relation to implementing the school's policies on behaviour and assessment
  - effectively monitoring all improvement activities, including those for which the school receives additional funding, to evaluate their impact and relevance to the school's key priorities and the core purpose of improving teaching and learning
  - analysing and addressing the barriers to pupils' progress, especially for boys, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, disadvantaged pupils and the most able
  - insisting that teachers consistently follow the school's policies, including those on assessment and behaviour management
  - listening to the views of parents when planning and evaluating the school's work.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Inadequate

- Leadership is inadequate because there has been a rapid decrease in outcomes, attendance and behaviour at key stages 3 and 4 over time. These are declining further for current pupils. Leaders have been hindered by their weak monitoring, overly detailed and unevaluated planning, a poor budget situation, staff inconsistencies in applying the school's policies, a high turnover of staff and recruitment difficulties.
- The new headteacher, who was appointed in September 2016, currently spends four days per week at the school, as he also leads another local school. He is fully aware of the challenges he faces, including standards which are visibly and unacceptably low. His enthusiasm, ambition for the young people in his care and genuine commitment to the school have galvanised staff and governors.
- The headteacher believes he has led a marked improvement across all aspects of the school in his short time in post. Inspectors, however, found no evidence of demonstrable impact, beyond a reduction in permanent exclusions. Inspectors were told that staff morale is better and some middle leaders said they are now less 'harassed' and 'micro-managed'. Nevertheless, current outcomes and attendance are falling.
- Leaders have not improved teaching. This is partly because there has not been an insistence on close adherence to the school's behaviour management and assessment policies. Too many teachers have been temporary or unqualified in specific subject areas. Some recent recruitment appears strong but it is too early to see an impact.
- The quality of teaching and pupils' achievement have been negatively affected by recruitment difficulties into key middle leadership posts. The head of English joined the school in September 2016 and the leaders of science at key stages 3 and 4 are new to their temporary posts. A substantive head of mathematics has yet to be appointed and a new special educational needs coordinator is yet to take up post.
- The school's financial position has had a negative impact upon the learning of pupils. Class sizes had increased to 30 in Years 7 to 9 for all groups of pupils, irrespective of ability. While this is the school's decision, in a report provided to inspectors, the academy trust's own school improvement adviser noted in September 2016, 'This is not sustainable!' Information from the school is that while class sizes are no longer as high, there are concerns around this issue.
- Leaders have not made good use of the substantial additional funding provided by the pupil premium grant. Outcomes in 2015/16 were exceptionally low for this group of pupils, and yet expenditure patterns for 2016/17 largely repeat those of the year before. There has been insufficient examination by leaders of the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils and how extra funding could help to overcome them.
- Leaders' use of funding to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has not been effective over time. Outcomes have not been strong and pupils' needs have not been well identified and supported.
- Leaders have not ensured an effective use of money provided to the school to support pupils who start Year 7 with attainment which is well below average. There continues

to be too little focus upon numeracy compared to literacy. This can be seen by school data, which indicates that only 3% of current Year 7 pupils make progress in numeracy, compared to 39% making significant progress in literacy.

- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. The curriculum, however, has not supported pupils' progress. Although pathways are available for pupils who are supported in their choices in Year 8, underachievement is seen across all subjects and year groups.
- The headteacher has taken immediate action to try and improve the school's curriculum. There have been two changes to the school day since September. The first introduced a tutor period at the end of the school day and the second, from January 2017, reduced the number of lessons per day from six to four. Leaders acknowledge that the tutor period is not proving to be as effective as they had hoped. Inspectors observed this period and saw too many pupils out of class unsupervised and learning time that was largely wasted. The tutor period time was used more effectively in the sixth form. It is too early to assess the impact that fewer but longer lessons will make, although early feedback from pupils and teachers is positive.
- Extra-curricular activities are varied, although heavily weighted towards sport. The most able pupils could not identify any areas other than sport in which they are involved regularly. Teachers take registers but there is no tracking of pupils who access extra-curricular opportunities.
- The school presented no evidence of analysing the views of parents to help evaluate the impact of its work. Feedback on Parent View was very negative from the small number of respondents, none of whom would recommend the school to others.
- There have been some improvements to how targets are set for teachers to develop their performance and these are related to outcomes for key groups of pupils. However, targets are not sufficiently specific or precise. As a result, it is difficult for leaders to check if targets are having an impact. Training offered to teachers is increasingly linked to key areas for improvement.
- Newly qualified teachers say they are supported at the school, including in being trained on how to keep pupils safe. There is liaison between them and colleagues from other schools at a similar stage of their careers. Newly qualified teachers told inspectors that the school had improved since the new headteacher started in September.
- Inspectors recommend that the school does not appoint any additional newly qualified teachers.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governance is inadequate. Governors accept their responsibility for the weak current position in which the school finds itself. They are aware that their scrutiny has not been robust enough. In discussions with inspectors, governors present a franker overview of current standards, and budgetary constraints, than that seen in school documentation. While the chair of governors states that recent changes to leadership will prove to be effective in the future, he told inspectors, 'We are aware of the challenges.' The commitment of governors to the school is clear but they have no

improvement record upon which to build.

- Although minutes of governing body meetings indicate that governors questioned leaders about the inaccuracy of predicted results in 2016, there is insufficient challenge for current outcomes which are even lower.
- While governors understand their responsibilities in relation to pupil premium and catch-up funding, they are under financial pressures to address the school's deficit. This has meant that they have paid insufficient attention to improving outcomes for young people and thus providing value for money for the extra funding the school receives.
- Governors are aware of the school appraisal system and the link between pay and outcomes. However, they acknowledge that this system is not leading to good outcomes for pupils.
- Governors have not ensured that the arrangements for safeguarding pupils in the school are successful.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Although policies and procedures relating to safeguarding are now fit for purpose, there is not yet a culture of safeguarding in the school. Some pupils raised concerns about bullying, as did a number of parents both prior to and during the inspection. Some pupils behave badly in and out of lessons. Moreover, attendance is low and declining for all groups of pupils. While the school has dramatically reduced the number of permanent exclusions, partly through reciprocal arrangements with another school, fixed-term exclusions remain high.
- The school, however, states in its self-review that safeguarding is good and regularly reviewed. Inspectors requested evidence of these reviews but none were provided.
- Sixth-form pupils say they have a better experience in the school and their environment is safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

### Inadequate

- Teaching is inadequate because pupils fail to make the progress they should and have underachieved over time. There is too much inconsistency in teaching across the school and within subjects. Teaching is often poorly planned and does not motivate pupils. This leads to a lack of engagement and, on too many occasions, poor behaviour.
- Pupils complain that their learning is routinely interrupted by low-level disruption in lessons. They feel that teachers are inconsistent in their approach to managing behaviour.
- Teachers do not use assessment information to meet the needs of pupils from their different starting points. This is the case across most subjects. It is having a negative impact, particularly upon boys, the most able, disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, too many pupils in

Years 10 and 11 do not know their target levels or how to improve their work.

- Many teachers have low expectations of what pupils can achieve. Planning does not lead to lessons that stretch and challenge the most able pupils sufficiently. Teaching is not leading to the rapid and sustained improvement required to meet the demands of the new and more challenging GCSEs.
- The school has adapted its approach to assessment to take account of the new performance measures for schools in terms of how it tracks pupils' outcomes. Information on the school website, in relation to English and mathematics GCSE, is out of date and unhelpful to parents as it does not refer to the new grading system.
- The school's own analysis shows that teaching has not improved since the summer of 2016.
- The school was unable to provide data on homework as it is moving to a new recording system. Analysis of planners and books shows that homework is erratic. It is not set in line with the school's policy and has not consistently supported learning. This reflects further a culture where teachers' expectations have been too low across most subjects.
- Leaders acknowledge that they have found it difficult to recruit high-quality teachers and agree with pupils who complain about the number of short-term supply staff. Currently about a fifth of teachers are supply staff or unqualified teachers.
- Where learning is best developed, it is because planning engages and challenges pupils and meets their needs. This was seen in pockets around the school, including in some geography, modern foreign languages, art and English lessons. Pupils' learning is more effective in creative subjects and practical lessons where they are more involved in their learning.
- Teaching is better in the sixth form, although not leading to consistently good academic outcomes. Classes are smaller, attitudes to learning are better and there is a focus upon progress. Even in these classes, however, some teachers are having to make up ground to compensate for previously less effective teaching.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Inadequate**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Many pupils complained about bullying at the school. Although pupils know to whom they should report concerns, they are not always confident that matters will be treated effectively and consistently.
- While there were very few responses to Parent View, the overwhelming majority of those who did comment raised concerns about bullying.
- Pupils can explain how they are taught to keep safe through assemblies and across the curriculum. The SOLACE (Self-Organised Learning at ACE) programme is aimed at improving pupils' self-confidence in their learning. This is not, however, having a positive impact upon the behaviour of a significant number of pupils, including in lessons. This is partly because teachers do not have uniformly high expectations. They

do not enable pupils to develop consistently good attitudes to learning and fail to implement the school's behaviour policy.

- Punctuality to lessons is poor for a minority of pupils, although school staff say this is improving.
- Opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of British values, such as democracy and respect for those of different faiths, are taken in the 'Our Space' lessons. Displays around the school make explicit reference to the importance of tolerance. A Year 7 assembly during the inspection was effective in explaining the benefits of charities both in the UK and abroad.
- The majority of staff who completed Ofsted's survey believe pupils are safe at the school.
- The school is developing opportunities for pupils to display leadership by expanding the school council to include all year groups, not just Year 7 and the sixth form.
- The school works closely and effectively with those providers to whom it sends pupils for alternative provision at key stage 4. There is regular monitoring of provision, standards, attainment and behaviour. Placements are successful, although issues of attendance match those of the main school. Of the 12 pupils placed on alternative provision outside the school, five have poor attendance.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- Too many pupils frequently misbehave in lessons. Some pupils report that this occurs in up to half of their lessons every day. This disruptive behaviour clearly prevents progress being made. Pupils state that behaviour is worse in lessons that do not have a regular teacher. The school's own data indicates a deterioration in the behaviour of current Year 7 pupils.
- Internal exclusion data indicates that withdrawal of pupils is increasing in response to lesson disruption. The lead inspector visited the internal isolation room. Pupils were sitting in single booths; many had no work to complete. The temperature was too hot for pupils to concentrate. The provision for these pupils is inadequate.
- Some pupils' behaviour is challenging between lessons and during social times. Almost all pupils speak of witnessing poor behaviour and inspectors experienced instances of intimidating behaviour, three of which were directed toward them. These were reported to the senior leaders, whose response was appropriate.
- Fixed-term exclusions remain very high but school information shows they have fallen. Since September 2016, there have been no permanent exclusions. Inspectors were told that 50 pupils had been permanently excluded since 2014. There have also been some managed moves with a local school.
- While the overwhelming majority of staff feel that the school has improved since the last inspection, of the 63 staff who completed the Ofsted questionnaire, over 60% do not fully agree that pupils' behaviour is good.
- The school has recently developed an alternative provision centre for pupils with challenging behaviour who require longer-term intervention. Learning in the centre is

more effective than in the rest of the school. Pupils feel secure in a well-ordered environment with good resources, small class sizes and specialist teachers. However, pupils told inspectors that they would prefer to be in the main school and were working well in order to return.

- The majority of pupils who spoke to inspectors were polite. A number felt the school was improving, particularly recently, but some did not. The school site is largely litter-free and there is no evidence of graffiti. Most pupils wear their school uniform well.
- Attendance remains consistently low. Attendance on the first day of inspection was 84%. Leaders were asked to account for this very low figure but did not. On the second day of inspection, attendance had improved to 87.6%.
- Overall, attendance is falling and remains well below the national average. School data for this academic year indicates that over a third of pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 are persistently absent from school.
- The behaviour and attitudes of students in the sixth form are more positive. Attendance is higher here than in the rest of the school.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Inadequate

- Outcomes are inadequate and declining. The progress of Year 11 pupils from their different starting points was exceptionally weak in 2016. The picture for the current cohort of pupils is worse.
- In 2016, Year 11 pupils' progress was over four fifths of a grade below others nationally. The school states that current data is accurate and indicates Year 11 progress to be over a grade below where it should be. The quality of work over time seen in books, poor-quality teaching and assessment, unsatisfactory attitudes in lessons, and declining pupil attendance do not support the school's predictions that outcomes will improve markedly from current levels at GCSE this summer.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress was significantly below that of other pupils nationally in 2016 and remains slow. This is because the school does not use funding effectively. The barriers faced by pupils are not sufficiently understood or acted upon.
- The progress of the most able pupils who left Year 11 in 2015 and 2016 was weak. Information presented by the school indicates that current most-able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are significantly underperforming in Years 9, 10 and 11. No data was presented for pupils in Years 7 and 8.
- The work set for most-able pupils in class does not routinely engage and challenge pupils or reflect their targets. Inspectors met with a group of most-able pupils across key stage 4, including some who are disadvantaged. Pupils felt safe at school and supported in their learning. Although they felt that behaviour had improved, they indicated that of their four lessons per day, one or two would be disrupted and impact negatively upon their learning.
- The progress of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities at the end of Year 11 in 2016 was very weak, as their needs had not been met. In the past, large numbers of pupils had been identified as requiring support in relation to their behaviour, rather than their learning needs. Although the school is training teachers to



meet specific learning needs, current outcomes remain inadequate. Progress and attainment for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are low and have fallen further in Years 9, 10 and 11 compared to information collected by the school in the autumn term.

- Inspectors listened to pupils read. These pupils included weaker readers and the most able pupils. Pupils could explain how they received help if required to understand words or phrases. The school's approach to literacy is stronger than numeracy. A strategy to help pupils develop numeracy skills is still being developed, despite this being an issue raised in the previous inspection.
- Pupils told inspectors that they valued the support they received at school in terms of preparing them for moves into higher and further education, training and employment. Most-able pupils told inspectors about Year 10 careers days and mock interviews. They also referred to optional talks from guest speakers during tutor time. This positive view of careers guidance is supported by data from 2015 and 2016. During the last two years, the proportion of pupils in education, employment and training after Year 11 has been in line with the national average.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

## Requires improvement

- Students' progress in academic programmes requires improvement. Pupils who studied AS-level courses in 2016 achieved half a grade less than they should. As a result, they are less well prepared for final year A-level study.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils up to 2015 was largely in line with their peers at school and nationally. The progress of most-able students in the sixth form is stronger. The school offers courses for some Year 12 students to develop better learning and social skills.
- Outcomes in the sixth form over time have been affected by variable teaching quality, as in the rest of the school. Teaching is more effective in vocational subjects. Progress on these courses is stronger than on academic courses and improving over time. Where teaching is more effective, it is addressing previous shortfalls in students' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- The sixth form is well led. The school is building upon its successes and now offers a more vocational pathway to students. Its longer-term strategy is to improve academic outcomes and offer a more varied choice of programmes to meet students' needs, irrespective of their ability.
- Current tracking indicates that outcomes will improve for Year 13 but fall for Year 12. The school accepts there are inconsistencies in the reliability of predictions. The school is also addressing the impact of previous poor teaching and outcomes for both Years 12 and 13.
- During the inspection, most Year 12 students were taking part in a three-week block of work experience. Employability skills are also developed through a strong careers programme, using outside speakers and involving students in developing organisational skills in charity work.
- Students who did not achieve a good pass in Year 11 are now given the opportunity to

study and retake English and mathematics at GCSE. Success rates are improving.

- Students speak highly of all aspects of the sixth form. They could explain how they are helped to keep safe from issues such as radicalisation and know how to form strong relationships through work done in assemblies. They appreciate the support they receive from tutors and feel the sixth form is well led. Students spoke particularly enthusiastically about the opportunities to act as mentors to younger pupils.

## School details

Unique reference number	139328
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10025156

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,434
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sir Geoff Hampton
Headteacher	Gary Hill
Telephone number	0121 5211540
Website	<a href="http://www.acesch.co.uk">www.acesch.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:gary.hill@acesch.co.uk">gary.hill@acesch.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	12–13 November 2014

## Information about this school

- Ace Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school became part of the Education Central Trust in 2013.
- The headteacher took up post in September 2016 and currently works at the school for four days per week.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average.
- The school does not meet the current government floor standards for 2016, which are the minimum expectations for progress at GCSE.
- The school meets the minimum interim standards for sixth forms.
- The school has an internal alternative provision centre for pupils whose behaviour needs greater support to enable them to be successful in the main school.
- The school uses five local alternative providers as off-site provision for a small number of pupils. These are Whiteheath, Cherry Trees, Albion, Dudley College and Startright.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons, including joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also undertook two learning walks, one of which was with the headteacher, in which a further 10 part-lessons were observed. Other activities included inspectors observing tutor group periods, visiting an assembly and listening to pupils read.
- Inspectors observed learning in the school’s alternative provision centre and the isolation room.
- Inspectors looked at pupils’ work in lessons and scrutinised a sample of work from a range of subjects.
- Inspectors observed pupils’ behaviour at break and lunchtime, between lessons and around the school site.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, middle leaders and newly qualified teachers.
- The lead inspector met with three representatives of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair of governors, and two representatives of the Education Central Trust.
- Meetings were held formally with four groups of pupils and a group of students from the sixth form to discuss their views about all aspects of the school. A number of other pupils were spoken to informally around the school.
- There were 16 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View, 13 responses to the free-text section within this, 63 responses to the online staff questionnaire and the lead inspector also spoke to one parent by telephone. These views were all considered. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors also considered a range of school documentation including: safeguarding information; self-review and the development plan; school pupil tracking data; school analysis of the quality of teaching; minutes of governors’ meetings; behaviour and attendance records and anonymised appraisal targets.

## Inspection team

Nigel Griffiths, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Bassett	Ofsted Inspector
Natasha Rancins	Ofsted Inspector
Russell Hinton	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Arkle	Ofsted Inspector

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