



The Walsall Academy

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 133697
LEA Walsall
Inspection number 283102
Inspection dates 9 November 2005 to 10 November 2005
Reporting inspector Jane Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Academy	School address	Lichfield Road
School category	Community		Bloxwich
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Walsall, West Midlands WS3 3LX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01922 493 910
Number on roll	766	Fax number	01922 492 186
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Sir Michael Wakeford
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mrs Jean Hickman

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 9 November 2005 - 10 November 2005	Inspection number 283102
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI).

Description of the school

Walsall Academy opened in September 2003 with an intake of students into Years 7 and 12 and the students from TP Riley School who transferred into Years 9 to 11. Two years on, it has had further intakes into Year 7 and the sixth form so that there are now students in all years except Year 10. Nineteen Year 11 students stayed on into the sixth form in 2005; the remainder were recruited from across the borough. There are currently 766 students on roll of whom 188 are in the sixth form. The academy is heavily oversubscribed.

The academy serves an area that is mixed in terms of social and economic disadvantage and advantage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average at 11%, although it is much higher in Year 11. The academy admits students from across the ability range. In Years 7 to 9, the students' results at primary school were slightly above average overall. This contrasts with Year 11, where students had low results at primary school. Students entering the sixth form have widely varying GCSE/GNVQ results but these are below average overall. An average proportion of students, 13%, has been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Of these, 23 students have statements of special educational need. About 80% of the students are White British. About half of the students from minority ethnic groups are of Indian or Pakistani heritage. No students have first languages other than English.

The academy's specialism is technology. It is impressively equipped with modern technology such as interactive whiteboards. The academy is fully staffed with 60 teachers; about a half are in the first three years of teaching.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The academy provides a good education for its students. This judgement matches the academy's own view. There is good capacity to improve. In its third year of being, the academy already has some notable strengths.

Students achieve well. They often make good progress in lessons. Results at GCSE/GNVQ and advanced level in 2005 indicate good achievement in relation to students' starting points on joining the academy. Students currently in Key Stage 3 are achieving at least satisfactorily. The students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Behaviour is excellent. Students are considerate of each other and have mature attitudes to their studies. They enjoy being at the academy; the attendance rate is outstandingly high. Support provided for students' future economic well-being is excellent. The focus on students' safety is very good. Students are well cared for and supported.

Teaching and learning are generally good throughout the academy. Teaching is usually lively and carefully planned to provide stimulating activities that challenge students to think for themselves. They develop very good independent learning skills. However, teachers do not use day-to-day assessment consistently well in planning lessons and marking work to enable all students to make rapid progress. The academy has a good system for reviewing students' progress but the way in which targets are set needs refinement. The curriculum is broad and rich. It has a number of distinctive features, some of which are outstanding.

The quality of leadership and management is good overall. The headteacher sets clear and demanding expectations for staff and students. Senior managers understand and accept their accountability for performance within specified areas of responsibility. The academy's self-evaluation tends to be descriptive rather than evaluative, but its judgements are largely accurate. Governance is good. Senior managers and governors deploy resources effectively and efficiently to support the students' learning and to promote the broader aims of the academy.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The academy judges the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form to be good; inspectors agree. The first cycle of Advanced-level courses and examinations culminated in 2005. Students of all abilities achieved well. The overall pass rate was high at 97% and the students' average points score was broadly average. Students enjoy being in the sixth form. They make the most of the opportunities to take responsibility and show care for younger students. They adopt mature attitudes to their studies. Many make effective use of the on-line curriculum to support their learning. Teaching is good overall. The best engages students in carefully sequenced tasks that develop their understanding and equip them to apply their knowledge to new situations. Discussion is vibrant. The quality of feedback provided on written work varies. There are shortcomings in academic guidance. Pastoral care is good, as is advice about

students' future options. The sixth form has been established successfully. Day-to-day management is good; the sixth form operates smoothly. Leadership is satisfactory. However, there is a lack of a clear overview of the current provision to inform and guide future development.

What the school should do to improve further

- provide teachers with better assessment information to aid planning and raise achievement
- make better use of the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation to determine priorities for development
- evaluate the sixth-form provision to inform and guide its future development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The academy judges achievement and standards to be good. Inspectors agree, although there remains a small legacy of underachievement in English. Results of the GCSE/GNVQ examinations in 2004 were close to the academy's targets, despite students' mid-course change from school to academy. Half were awarded five or more A* to C grades, representing good achievement. However, only three in five students achieved five A* to G grades. In 2005, results improved to 65% and 76% respectively, with more students gaining higher-grade passes in English and mathematics. Given their starting points, students achieved well.

The sixth form completed its first cycle of advanced-level courses and examinations in 2005. Students of all abilities achieved well but particularly those who studied vocational courses following modest GCSE/GNVQ results in 2003. The overall pass rate was high at 97% and the students' average points score was broadly average at 241. The best-performing subjects were business studies and information and communication technology (ICT). Many students gained places at university. The academy had no Year 9 students in 2004-05. The achievement of students currently in Key Stage 3 is at least satisfactory.

In lessons, students often make good progress. This is, in part, attributable to improvements in teaching, but also to students' strong motivation to succeed. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally make satisfactory progress. The academy gathers data each term but, although there is a suitable structure, refinement is needed before data can be relied upon to measure, track and analyse students' progress accurately over time. In particular, targets do not always offer the right level of challenge, and methods of assessment do not consistently reflect students' attainment.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors judge that students' personal development and well-being is outstanding. The academy evaluated it to be good but the strength of so many aspects add up to outstanding development overall. Students enjoy their education, speaking enthusiastically about the academy and their teachers. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall; a strong and effective moral and social framework is clearly evident. The student council has an extensive role in the academy's successful charitable fundraising. Students are socially at ease with their peers. Behaviour is excellent. Exclusion rates are below average; follow-up procedures are effective. Students feel secure and know where to seek help if they have any problems. The culture of praise and celebration builds their confidence and is reflected in their positive attitudes and contributions in lessons. Students work well, independently and as members of teams.

Attendance is outstandingly high. Monitoring systems are very effective and absence is followed up promptly. Students receive comprehensive careers guidance and are well informed about choices of courses and career paths. They benefit from very good opportunities to participate in work-related learning. The development of students' future economic well-being is outstanding; a strong technological focus pervades the work of the academy, enhanced by effective links with the business community. Students have a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. They appreciate the choice of healthy foods in the academy's restaurant and participate in various physical education activities.

Students enjoy being in the sixth form. What they like about it far outweighs what they would like to see improved. They make the most of the opportunities to take responsibility, for example showing care for younger students in their tutor group.

They adopt mature attitudes to their studies and most organise their folders well. Many make effective use of the on-line curriculum to support their learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the academy's judgment that teaching and learning are good. Teaching is usually lively; lessons are planned carefully and usually provide stimulating activities that challenge students to think for themselves. Good attention is paid to making sure that time is used profitably and that students work hard. Checks on their progress are frequent, both in lessons and at the end of each module of work. Learning is particularly effective when teachers invite students to consider for themselves how well they are achieving, and what they need to do next. The best sixth-form teaching equips the students to apply knowledge to new situations. Discussion is vibrant;

students ask, as well as answer, questions. Occasionally, students are passive and progress is slower.

The senior managers constantly encourage and give good support to teachers, many of whom speak warmly about how much they enjoy their work. A particular strength of the academy is the way in which teachers work together to plan lessons and the way in which they regularly review the impact of their work. A further strength is the widespread use of ICT to support teaching and learning. Mature and positive attitudes to learning help students to live up to their teachers' high expectations and, as they progress through the academy, they develop very good independent learning skills. The weakest aspect of teaching is the match of activities to the needs and abilities of individual students. Those who have learning difficulties are occasionally given work that is too hard and their teaching assistants do not always play an active enough part in lessons. Weaker students are not routinely helped to develop their literacy skills.

Although the academy has a good system for reviewing the progress made by students towards their end-of-key-stage targets, the way in which targets are set needs refinement as they are not always suitable. Modular targets sometimes focus on attitudes rather than academic progress. Some, but not all, aspects of day-to-day assessment are good. Many teachers regularly refer to assessment criteria and discuss what constitutes good work. However, marking does not always set out clearly what students need to do to improve, and not all lesson objectives are based on up-to-date and accurate information about individuals' potential and progress. These weaknesses in assessment mean that not all students are enabled to make the rapid progress that the academy expects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad and rich. It has a number of distinctive features, some of which are outstanding. The school day is longer than in most other secondary schools and the longer lesson times give teachers and students opportunities to be flexible in their approaches to teaching and learning and to encourage independent learning. The use of ICT is at the heart of the delivery of the curriculum and the academy has a national and international reputation for its work in this field.

Students have opportunities to specialise in technology, mathematics, and science as well as following a mixture of academic and vocational courses. In many subjects, students have access to an on-line curriculum; this work will be complete by September 2006. Where needed, Year 11 students receive work-related and off-site provision. Sixth-form students choose from a wide range of advanced-level courses and all study for a vocational qualification in ICT. Curriculum resources across the academy are plentiful and of very high quality. The academy has extended the support provided for students who have weak literacy skills and other learning difficulties, but some of this is in the early stages.

Students benefit from very good extra-curricular and enrichment activities, many of which take place in the optional third session of the day. These include various sporting,

musical, and other after-school clubs, as well as educational and social visits and trips at home and abroad. Rates of participation are more modest in the sixth form.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. This agrees with the academy's evaluation. Termly monitoring meetings with students and parents contribute to effective pastoral support. Daily tutor-group meetings have a clear focus; older students help younger ones. Students are given good advice on their future options but academic guidance, including that provided to prospective sixth-form students, requires further development.

The academy has a range of effective policies that promote students' well-being and safety. The requirements for child protection are firmly in place and staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. Systems to monitor racism and bullying meet statutory requirements. Management of the very wide range of support services available to students is clear and coherent, and there are effective procedures for identifying students who may be at risk. Learning mentors and student-support staff work successfully with vulnerable students.

About half the parents responded to the inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority were glowing in their praise, although one in eight commented on some difficulty in communicating with the academy.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors agree with the academy's judgement that the quality of leadership and management is good overall. The headteacher is committed to developing the academy as a centre of excellence. She sets clear and demanding expectations for staff and students, displaying an unwavering confidence that development targets will be met. Other senior managers understand and accept their accountability for performance within specified areas of responsibility, including deploying and managing staff. Appropriate job descriptions and performance management procedures enable teachers to be clear about what is expected of them. They are confident in the support provided by senior managers and are eager to rise to the challenge of delivering the academy's goals. Teachers and support staff are given access to a broad range of professional development activities. Levels of uptake vary and the academy is seeking to improve systems for monitoring the impact of these activities.

The sixth form has been established successfully as an integral part of the academy. The long-term vision is that all students will naturally progress into it. Day-to-day management is good; the sixth form operates smoothly, but leadership is satisfactory, rather than good as judged by the academy. There is a lack of a clear overview of the

current provision to inform and guide its future development. Analysis of performance data is underdeveloped, for example to gauge how well students have done in relation to their starting points and in different subjects.

The academy's self-evaluation is wide-ranging and detailed, although more descriptive than evaluative. Significant priorities are sometimes difficult to extract from long lists of initiatives. The draft development plan for 2005-08 is a coherent and practical document. Introductory sections generate an authentic sense of the academy as a centre for implementing strategies to improve learning. The plan makes a considered response to the findings of previous monitoring visits. Plans for curricular areas are consistent in format but vary in quality from good to inadequate. Senior managers and governors deploy resources effectively and efficiently to support the students' learning and to promote the broader aims of the academy.

Governance is good. The governing board receives detailed reports from the head, and governors are prepared to challenge the status quo and ask pertinent questions in order to make informed decisions. They show strategic awareness in adapting procedures to respond to the academy's constituency, for example establishing parental representation on the governing board.

There is good capacity for improvement on what the academy currently achieves. Senior staff and other managers recognise the importance of cultivating an effective self-evaluating academy.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Walsall Academy Lichfield Road Bloxwich Walsall West Midlands WS3 3LX

11 November 2005

Dear Students

I am writing to tell you about the findings of our inspection but, first of all, I would like to thank you for giving us such a warm welcome to the academy. We enjoyed visiting your lessons, looking at your work, and talking to you about your experiences at the academy.

We agree with you that the academy is giving you a good education. We share your view about its impressive and technologically advanced facilities - we could see that you appreciate them. You showed your pride by dressing smartly and in your excellent behaviour. You were polite and considerate to each other and to the staff. Through your fundraising activities, you raise money to help others in different circumstances from your own. You told us how much you enjoy being at the academy. Your attendance rate is outstanding! The staff take good care of you, especially your personal tutors.

Because the academy is only in its third year, there have not been many sets of examination results in Years 9, 11 and the sixth form. In 2005, the Year 11 students did well in their GCSE/GNVQs and more stayed on into the sixth form than in the previous year. The sixth-formers also achieved good results and most have gone on to university. You work hard in lessons and most of you are learning at a good rate, helped by the interesting and challenging things your teachers give you to do. Occasionally, the work is too difficult for some students or easy for others. When teachers mark your work, they do not always give you helpful information about how to improve or meet your targets.

Many of you enjoy participating in the extra opportunities you have in session III at the end of the day, for example in sports, drama and music, as well as visits and residential trips. These are helping you to develop a broad outlook on life.

The academy is very well organised by the headteacher and deputies, helped by teachers and other adults. It is businesslike, and everyone knows what is expected of them. There is much that is good but we have asked the head and staff to improve a few things:

- to make sure teachers have accurate information about the standard of your work both previously and now so that they can plan activities of exactly the right challenge for each of you and help you learn quickly.
- to improve the ways managers gather together information about the academy's work to check how well everything is working and plan for the future.
- to review the sixth form now that it has completed its first two years to see what the next steps should be in its development. We are sure that you will want to play your part in helping the headteacher, staff and governors to develop the work of the academy further.

We wish you every success in the future.

Jane Jones HMI