

Dixons City Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	130909
Inspection number	317907
Inspection dates	20–21 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sara Morrissey HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
Academy	1078
6th form	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sr James Hill Bt. OBE DL
Principal	Mr Nick Weller
Date of previous academy inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	Ripley Street Bradford West Yorkshire BD5 7RR
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the academy

Dixons City Academy opened in September 2005 following its re-designation from a city technology college. It remains on the same site but has benefited from an additional building programme to improve facilities further. It is a popular and heavily over-subscribed school and sixth form. It attracts students from across Bradford and from a diverse range of social and economic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average. While the majority of students are White British there is a higher than average proportion of students from different minority ethnic groups. The two groups most represented are from families of Indian and Pakistani origin. Very few students speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry in most year groups is well above the national average. However, the 'fair banding' admissions introduced in September 2007 means that the prior attainment on entry of current Year 7 students is closer to the national average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school has subject specialisms in technology, performing arts and vocationalism. As a Leading Edge school and a training school, Dixons City Academy works in partnership with a number of external providers. It also works in partnership with other schools in the South Bradford confederation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 1

Dixons City Academy is a high performing school that places the student at its heart. This is reflected in an academy ethos that enables students from many different backgrounds to grow in confidence and thrive as learners. A 'can-do' culture has been established in which expectations are high. Students and staff rise to the challenges presented to them and have sustained and built on achievements since the academy opened in 2005. This success is enhanced by the strong three-way partnership that exists between students, parents and staff which in turn supports the academy's outstanding capacity to improve further.

Excellent care, guidance and support ensure that students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Good teaching and students' outstanding attitudes to learning contribute to the academy's high levels of achievement and standards. Teachers are generally eager to adopt new approaches to engage students actively in their learning. However, some inconsistency remains in the use of strategies to assess the quality of students' learning so that all can achieve their full potential. A varied and well-planned curriculum captures students' interest and offers excellent choices for those embarking on Key Stage 4 courses. Resources are used creatively and new technologies support and enrich the curriculum. Extra-curricular activities extend students' experiences and build their confidence and skills for the future.

A continuous drive for improvement, led very effectively by the principal and senior leaders, ensures that the academy is not complacent about its current success. Governors provide robust challenge and support in holding the academy to account. Thorough and accurate monitoring and evaluation procedures enable good practice to be shared and areas for development to be identified. However, opportunities are missed to target these processes specifically at aspects of provision that require closer attention in order to maximise outcomes for students.

The academy has established a number of partnerships to extend its role in the wider community. Outreach activity with other local schools has contributed well to the reduction of exclusions and increased access to training and employment in the area. As a training school, effective partnerships have been established with higher education institutes and other schools to enhance the professional development opportunities available to staff. Subject specialisms contribute well to the academy curriculum and beyond. For example, the performing arts department makes a strong contribution to the work of a number of external bodies, notably a special school and a community support group.

Students are proud of their academy. The commitment of staff to achieving the best outcomes for students is also recognised by the overwhelming majority of parents who speak highly of the way in which the academy develops their child both personally and academically.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision in the sixth form is good and improving. Particular strengths lie in the quality of care, guidance and support and personal development and well-being. Students are fully involved in the life of the academy and they speak highly about the community ethos, high expectations and individual preparation for further employment or higher education. Relationships between staff and students are warm and respectful. Students value the opportunities presented to them during their time at the sixth form. The curriculum is good with a full range of A level and vocational courses and students are able to access a variety of enrichment opportunities.

Performance continues to improve across the sixth form and standards are high. The academy has responded very well to previous variations in attainment between year groups and students make good progress overall, related to their attainment prior to entering the sixth form. Continued excellent performance in music, English language and sociology is evident. Teaching and learning are good overall and students are fully involved in assessing their progress over time. The sixth form is effectively led and managed by a new head of sixth form, who is building on established strengths and further reviewing key aspects including assessment and the curriculum to maximise students' outcomes.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Target monitoring and evaluation processes more precisely to ensure that outcomes for students are maximised.
- Use 'assessment for learning' strategies consistently to ensure that students are appropriately challenged in all lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students have high expectations of themselves and work hard to achieve challenging targets. A dynamic learning environment contributes to an achievement culture that is well established across the academy. Consequently, students make significant gains in their learning and their achievement is outstanding overall. Standards attained by students in all years are high. The proportion of students gaining the expected levels by the end of Year 9 is exceptionally high in English, mathematics and science and a significant number gain the highest levels. Students maintain high standards so that by the end of Year 11 they have consolidated their earlier achievements. Results from Year 11 examinations taken in 2007 show that challenging targets were exceeded for the proportion of students attaining at least five A* to C passes at GCSE.

Students' individual needs are well understood by staff so that they can tailor support to accelerate progress. Consequently, there is little variation in the progress made by different groups of learners. Effective tracking systems enable teachers to identify variations in progress made by students in different subjects and across year groups. This means that teachers are able to identify where there is a risk of underachievement so that strategies can be implemented swiftly to tackle areas for improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students place very high value on what the academy provides for them and their enjoyment of learning is evident throughout the school. Student attendance is excellent and they are conscientious and highly motivated to succeed. They work well independently and use very good teamwork skills with confidence. Behaviour is excellent during lessons and at break-times. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Relationships between students are a particular strength and they feel safe from racism and other forms of bullying. They can talk in detail about the importance of diet and exercise to healthy living. Students make very effective use of the many opportunities provided for them to express their views about life in school. This contributes significantly to decisions made by the academy, for

example, the recent updating of the anti-bullying policy. Through groups such as the student council and eco-council, students develop good skills in decision-making and managing projects. Many are also involved in activities and charities to support people in the local and wider community. Students' personal qualities, high attainment and extensive work-related learning give them an excellent foundation for their future education, training or employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors agree with the academy's view that the quality of teaching is good. Students' very positive attitudes to learning help to accelerate their progress further. Teachers plan lessons carefully using a common format and adapt the work to ensure that all students are able to make excellent progress. They develop resources well to support different activities in lessons and cater for different learning styles by, for example, exploiting information and communication technology (ICT) effectively.

In the best lessons, a high level of challenge and expectation involves students fully in their learning and they make outstanding progress. Activities are briskly paced, including group and paired work, and students' level of enjoyment is high. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and relationships between students and teachers are excellent. However, in some lessons, the work is insufficiently demanding, with an over-reliance on worksheets and textbooks. This results in fewer opportunities for students to develop independence. Despite this, students' attitudes to learning remain positive and they continue to make good progress. The academy is developing its work on 'assessment for learning'. Good examples of skilled questioning and of students evaluating their own and other students' work to establish a clear understanding of how to improve are evident. In the most effective lessons, this strengthens students' ability to work independently and they make rapid progress. Similarly, students value timely and constructive marking of workbooks with clear targets for improvement. However, the quality and quantity of marking is variable across the academy. It is not always regularly completed and does not always explain to students how they might improve and make even greater progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum makes a significant contribution to both students' personal and social development and their academic attainment. At Key Stage 3, there is an increased emphasis on performing arts, reflecting the specialist status and a focus on accelerating performance, particularly in modern foreign languages and ICT. Many opportunities exist for students to develop their citizenship and enterprise skills within the business and personal development studies programmes of study. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides an excellent balance between academic, vocational and work-based learning opportunities. An extended range of vocational courses is available and enhanced provision is developing across the curriculum, particularly in technology and performing arts. Excellent links exist with a number of neighbouring schools and the wider community and the school has taken a lead role in developing vocational provision

within the region. 'Innovation days', enjoyed and valued by students, also promote high levels of independent learning and provide opportunities to develop skills across a wide range of subjects. Comprehensive guidance ensures there is a close match to both Key Stage 4 preferences and post-16 aspirations. Students recognise the academy's extra-curricular provision as a strength. Activities cater for a range of interests and abilities and are wide ranging, including sport, music, drama, residential visits and community projects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Outstanding care, guidance and support underpin the very positive ethos that permeates the academy community. Students receive very good guidance to help them to become responsible young adults who can make healthy and safe choices. Procedures for safeguarding students are very robust. Students who have concerns know which staff can help them or, if more appropriate, they may be referred to another student who has been specially trained to provide counselling. Students with individual needs affecting their learning or well-being are quickly identified and given very good support, both in the classroom or at home when they cannot attend school. The academy works very effectively with parents and external care services in providing this support. Staff go to great lengths to ensure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can be fully included in all aspects of school life.

Assessment information is used very effectively to monitor students' progress and to give them challenging personal targets. Teachers provide clear advice to the students and their parents on what work is needed to reach these targets and, as a result, most students improve their rate of progress. Students are given very good guidance in preparation for post-16 education. This helps to ensure that only a very small proportion do not continue in education, employment or training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The principal provides outstanding leadership and has communicated a clear strategic direction for the academy. All staff are very clear about the principal's expectations of them and are united in their pursuit of high achievement for all students. Senior leaders undertake their roles and responsibilities effectively and support the principal well. The role of assistant headteachers has been reviewed and they contribute well to the monitoring of provision, linked to specific subject areas. Middle leaders understand their responsibilities and contribute appropriately to school self-evaluation. In some departments, for example humanities, effective leadership has contributed to higher levels of student achievement. The capacity of middle leadership has also been strengthened further by targeted training and key staff appointments.

An extensive and accurate whole-school system of self-evaluation involving all staff informs development planning. However, although these systems are well established, opportunities are missed to target the review process more sharply on aspects of provision that warrant further scrutiny, for example, the consistent implementation of 'assessment for learning' strategies. Governors are supportive and challenging in their role of holding the academy to

account. They are very clear about the priorities and also the responsibilities of the academy in extending partnerships across the local area. Financial management is robust and well managed.

Staff work together confidently in teams and have been able to sustain high student achievement because agreed procedures are clearly understood and consistently followed. They value the training and support to develop their practice further. Many opportunities exist for teachers to share good practice and experiment with more innovative strategies. Furthermore, different groups of staff work in partnership with neighbouring schools and increasingly the local authority, to improve the provision offered at the academy and in the wider community.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	Academy 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?	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the academy work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the academy's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this academy require special measures?	No	
Does this academy require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

On behalf of the inspection team I would like to thank you all for the very warm welcome that was extended to us during our recent visit. We were all impressed by the strong community spirit that exists across the academy. Many of you told us that you were proud to be part of Dixons City Academy and how much you appreciate the opportunities that you are given during your time at the school. Following our inspection, I am delighted to be able to tell you that we have judged your academy to be outstanding. This is a great achievement for all who are involved with the academy.

Congratulations!

Our inspection findings highlighted many of the strengths that you described in your discussions with us. Mr Weller and all the staff have worked well together to create a school where you can enjoy your learning and achieve your best. You were keen to tell us about the excellent support and help you receive from the moment that you start at school, which helps you to grow in confidence and achieve well. The academy provides you with a wide range of courses and activities that broaden your experiences and prepare you well for the future. Good teaching and interesting work enable you to make the progress that leads to high examination results at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13.

However, inspectors also found that senior staff are always looking for ways to improve the academy further. We have agreed with Mr Weller that there are two areas that the academy should focus on. These are to:

- target systems used to check progress made by the academy more sharply on the areas where they are most needed
- make sure that the different ways in which learning is assessed by teachers and students are used in all lessons to help you achieve your best.

Your excellent approach to school life has made an important contribution to its success. I am sure that you will want to maintain the same high levels of effort and determination to help your teachers improve your academy further.