

St Paul's Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105135
Inspection number	317974
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Carmen Rodney HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
Academy	731
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Mallen
Principal	Mr Patrick Winston
Date of previous academy inspection	Not previously inspected
Academy address	Wickham Lane Abbey Wood SE2 0XX
Telephone number	020 8311 3868
Fax number	020 8312 1642

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the academy

St Paul's Academy is a small secondary school with specialisms in sports and enterprise. The academy opened in 2005 on the site of the former school, St Paul's Catholic School. Plans are in place for the academy to move from its present site into new buildings at the Abbey Wood secondary school site in 2010. The new build will increase its capacity to accommodate 1200 students and will admit 240 students annually. Currently, over 440 students apply for the 150 available places.

The academy serves a socially disadvantaged area and just over half of its students come from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well above average. Around a quarter of students, have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is above average. The academy has a designated Special Provision Unit for 16 students with moderate and complex difficulties. Attainment on entry is broadly average but there has been a marked decline in basic skills over the last two years. There are twice as many boys as girls.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the academy

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. The senior managers and governors of St Paul's Academy are ambitious for its students. Leaders at all levels pursue the principle of 'opening doors and creating opportunities' for the students because they are determined to 'get all of them through the doors of high expectations and aspirations.' Staff and governors therefore act as excellent role models by using their personal experiences and expertise to spur on students to do well.

The vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection survey recognise the determination of the staff to help their children succeed so that they are well prepared socially and academically for the next stage of their life. Parents like the Catholic ethos and ethics that the academy fosters and the 'diverse mix of children', they are impressed by the support available and feel that their children are 'secure and happy to attend each day'. However, they have reservations about the shortcomings of the cramped accommodation and the likely impact on their children's well-being. These views reflect the inspection findings.

The principal and chair of the governing body are passionate about education and equal opportunities. They inspire the staff to help all students to achieve well. Under the exceptionally good leadership of the principal, the academy has made substantial changes in the quality of provision within a short time. For example, he has restructured the workforce and distributed responsibilities among leaders and managers. Planning for improvement is extensive but initiatives, though evaluated, are not always fully recorded. Although there is still more work to do to ensure consistency across the learning zones (subject areas), all leaders know what must be done to drive improvement. The school knows what it must do to get even better and therefore has good capacity to improve further.

Standards are average at the end of Key Stage 3 and above at Key Stage 4 in the proportion of students obtaining five or more A*-C GCSE grades. Students make the most progress during Years 10 and 11, and progress is good overall. Standards have improved significantly over the last two years and in 2007, the academy achieved some of its best results in the core subjects, particularly in English and science in both key stages and in a number of subjects at Key Stage 4. Improvements have been sustained because of the emphasis placed on improving teaching and learning, which is good overall. However, the academy recognises that consistency is needed across all learning zones to maintain the momentum of improvement.

Central to the good progress that students make is the well-conceived curriculum in Years 9, 10 and 11. Courses such as information and communication technology (ICT) have been carefully selected to raise standards and develop personalised learning. Strong links have been developed with local colleges and schools and there is a tangible feeling that this is increasing students' confidence, independence and work ethic. The flexibility of the curriculum, combined with students' good behaviour and attitudes, mean that learning is pursued with pleasure and combined with good achievement, which fulfils the academy's aim.

A main strength of the academy lies in the good quality pastoral care provided for students. The chaplaincy, including the mentoring, provides excellent support for students, particularly for those who are vulnerable. The academy has a rich body of data to track students' progress. Although there is good practice in some learning zones such as in English, physical education (PE) and ICT, there is not yet a comprehensive system for managing and analysing assessment information.

What the academy should do to improve further

- Improve the system for managing and analysing data, so that the achievements of students can be more carefully monitored and interpreted.
- Build on improvements in teaching and learning to make lessons even more interesting and challenging so that all students can learn as well as possible.
- Develop and embed the quality of self-evaluation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' rates of progress have improved significantly since the school opened as an academy in 2005. The unvalidated 2007 results in the national tests showed that students achieved well at the end of Year 9 particularly in English and science where they made better progress and exceeded the set targets. Although the most able reached the highest levels in mathematics, a significant number of students did not achieve the level expected for their age group. Analysis of results indicates that this is linked to the early entry of Year 8 students for the national tests. The academy has now taken a policy that students will only be entered early for the tests if they are likely to achieve or exceed the standard expected.

In 2007, 82% of Year 11 students gained five or more GCSE A*–C grades. This high achievement far exceeded the national average and placed the school in the top 25% of all schools. Standards are above average overall though progress and standards in mathematics are average. This significant improvement in results is due to a number of factors, mostly: an innovative curriculum that is tailored to the needs of students in Years 9, 10 and 11, good quality teaching and an aspirational culture that involves parents and the academy working together to accelerate students' progress. Students made the most progress in English, science and PE.

Most students of all abilities, including those from different ethnic groups make good or better progress. With the exception of statemented students who attend the special unit, students with a learning difficulty or disability make similar progress to their peers. However, recent tracking data reveals that White boys do not always achieve as well as their peers. The academy is using a good range of strategies to ensure that these students do not underachieve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are very positive about school. Levels of attendance were slightly above the national average last year. The academy has reviewed its practice in this area and recently employed a dedicated attendance officer. Levels of attendance have improved further this term. The majority of students behave safely and sensibly, both in lessons and when moving about the congested site. Students have good attitudes to learning. In a few lessons, usually where teaching is less engaging, their enjoyment of learning decreases and minor misbehaviour can occasionally distract from learning. Students confirm that the rare instances of bullying and harassment are dealt with effectively.

Despite the restrictions of the school site, students have good opportunities to eat healthily and take part in a wide range of physical activity. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments are outstanding and they make an excellent contribution to the academy and wider community. The pupil council plays a very active role in the life of the academy and students are involved in an impressive range of charity fund raising events. The academy

prepares students well for the next stage in their education. Extensive links with other providers ensure that the vast majority of students progress to education or training when they leave.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good because most lessons are well planned and carefully structured so that they contain a good range of challenging activities that students enjoy. Teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are generally high and most students respond positively to those expectations and consequently, they achieve well and take pride in their achievements. Most lessons are taught at a brisk pace and the tasks and activities are well matched to students' needs and interests. Questioning is usually used well to encourage students to develop their thinking skills and they receive good oral feedback to help them develop their understanding of the topic being studied. Marking of written work is generally good, and provides sound advice on how students' work can be improved. However, students do not always act on the advice given. In a small minority of lessons, the pace is uninspiring and expectations of what students can achieve are too low. These lessons are dominated by too much teacher talk and students are not given enough opportunity to be actively engaged in their learning or in assessing their own progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good because it is broad and balanced and meets the needs of most students. There have been recent improvements, including an increase in the time allocated for PE in Year 11. The academy is working hard to develop a curriculum that is flexible and responsive to students' needs and allows them to pursue courses, which lead to GCSE accreditation, or to follow a vocational pathway and chose a mixture of GCSE and vocational courses. Vocational choices include travel and tourism, art and design and sport and leisure. The curriculum is further enriched by the extended academy day and the opportunities for a small number of students in Years 10 and 11 to attend courses at local colleges to develop skills in construction and in hospitality and catering. There are good opportunities for students in Years 9, 10 and 11 to develop other skills relevant to the workplace or for further study through a series of good work-based learning and enterprise activities. The academy has created many opportunities for Year 9 students to begin gaining formal qualifications early because some are entered successfully for the national tests at the end of Year 8.

Accommodation for PE is inadequate and many PE lessons have to take place off site. This enables students to have access to a good range of high quality facilities but the travelling time imposes limits on the time available for learning. There are good opportunities for learning about other cultures; for example, students participate in Black history month and are exposed to writers from other cultures. The academy's specialisms of sport and enterprise are having a positive impact on raising attainment by improving students' engagement and their self-confidence. Students are encouraged to become independent, take responsibility for their own learning and work in partnership with others. There are also good opportunities through sports and other activities for students to develop their capacity for leadership and team working.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support that students receive is a strength of the academy's work. Staff know students very well and work hard to meet their diverse needs. Arrangements for care and support benefit from the close, effective working between learning mentors and the chaplaincy team, and from excellent relationships with a very broad range of outside agencies and organisations. The academy provides strong support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The site is very cramped and congested, but staff work hard to ensure that students are able to move around the school safely. Procedures to safeguard students meet current requirements. Students are given extensive support in choosing options and in making decisions about future education, training and employment.

Students are generally aware of their targets and understand what they need to do to reach them, although there is some variation between subjects. The academy recently introduced a system to analyse information about all aspects of students' progress, including their academic achievement. This is beginning to help leaders to monitor individual students more closely, to identify those who are making insufficient progress, and to target extra support more closely. However, the system is at an early stage of development and is yet to make a significant impact on students' outcomes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The principal's exceptional leadership skills drive the academy forward. He has provided a clear steer for the academy and his thoughtful and visionary approach has built confidence in the future. Consequently, students, staff and parents can talk knowledgeably about evident changes and their expectations of what the academy will be able to provide when the new build materialises. Despite the poor quality accommodation and the negative impact this has on rolling out some of the planned initiatives, such as expanding the curriculum further, the principal has carefully prioritised the academy's school improvement plan by concentrating on developing teaching and learning.

The outstanding leadership of the principal ably supported by the vice-principals therefore drives improvement. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the academy's performance and they recognise that systems of accountability are crucial to sustaining improvement. School improvement is therefore driven through well-structured meetings with other senior managers who account for performance in their respective learning zones. As a result, there is ownership of planned changes and managers are working hard to put them into practice.

Senior leaders have anticipated that the delay in the new build could undermine the good measures taken to retain good quality teachers. They have therefore used one of the academy's outstanding strengths, which lies in spotting talents, nurturing, training and deploying staff. This is helping to retain a stable staff who are committed to the principles of the academy. Such is their dedication to the academy that the poor facilities are not allowed to dampen the academy's prime aim of increasing students' thirst for knowledge. Governors carry out their statutory duties very well and hold the academy to account through challenging its performance, spending and plans for future development.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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

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?	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	2
The effectiveness of the academy's self-evaluation	2
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

10 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of St Paul's Academy,,SE2 0XX

We would like to convey our thanks for helping us with our work when we inspected your academy. We enjoyed meeting some of you and your parents. Thank you for your comments and openness when you talked to us.

St Paul's is a good school and you and your parents are rightly positive about its provision. The academy is new but it is preparing you well for the next stage of your life. We agree with you and your parents that the academy still has more to offer when it moves to improved buildings because the present staggered lunch and accommodation restricts your movements. Despite these drawbacks, we were impressed by the way that most of you behave within the confined corridors and restricted space. Your principal and governors are hopeful that arrangements for the new build will begin soon.

Since the academy opened, your tests and exam results have improved each year. Most of you are achieving the challenging targets set for you, and the 2007 test and GCSE results showed that you are making good progress. A high proportion of Year 11 students achieved five or more higher grade GCSE passes. This was a great achievement. You have good attitudes to your learning. We support your views that the curriculum is developing well and there is a good range of options to choose from in Years 9, 10 and 11. We felt that the opportunities in sports and business enterprise are helping you to achieve well. The chaplaincy, mentors, tutors and all teachers offer you very good support: you and your parents appreciate the information on your progress and well-being as well as on the activities taking place in the academy. The school council plays a crucial role in your development and we agree with you and your parents that the academy is helping you to develop a wide range of skills. For example, your financial ventures, which increase your contribution to the academy and community. The academy recognises that it is helping you to receive an effective education and it is building on the existing strong relationships.

There are a few areas that the academy recognises it needs to build on to give you an even better education. The system for collecting and using data on your progress needs to be more efficient so that you can get the maximum help quickly. Evaluation of your performance needs to be rigorous, recorded, and teaching needs to be more challenging and interesting in all lessons so that you can all learn at an even faster rate. We are confident that the academy will continue to improve. We wish you well in the future.

Carmen RodneyLead inspector HMI