

# John Madejski Academy

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	130247
<b>Local Authority</b>	Reading
<b>Inspection number</b>	330760
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 October 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Linda McGill HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	779
Sixth form	53
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Anthony Hudson
<b>Principal</b>	Ms Catherine Shaw
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Academy address</b>	Hartland Road Reading RG2 8AF
<b>Telephone number</b>	0118 937 0200
<b>Fax number</b>	0118 937 0200

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The John Madejski Academy opened in September 2006. It is smaller than the average secondary school, but student numbers are rising steadily and for the past two years there were more applicants for Year 7 than places available. A significant number of students join the academy in other year groups during the academic year. Boys outnumber girls by two to one. About a fifth of the students are from minority ethnic heritages, but few are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. The number of students eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. Almost half of the students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The range of additional needs is wide, including difficulties with behaviour, learning, and speech, language and communication. The proportion of students who have a formal statement of special educational need is double that found nationally. The academy has a specialism in sport. It has recently achieved Investors in People status.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the academy

### Grade: 2

John Madejski Academy is a good school, and is rapidly improving. Since it opened two years ago, there have been significant improvements on a number of fronts, of which the academy can rightly be proud. In particular, the students are making good progress in their learning, which has led to a substantial rise in standards. The unvalidated GCSE results for 2008 show a marked increase in the proportion of students gaining five good passes including English and mathematics. Attendance has risen, is now above the national average and is testament to the students' growing enjoyment of their education. Students are increasingly interested and involved in their learning, and their personal development is good.

All of these improvements happened for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is clear, strong and unswerving leadership from the top. The principal sets a positive tone for the academy's work and senior leaders and staff at all levels do not let her down. Staff and governors share a firm commitment to continuing improvement. Secondly, the care, guidance and support provided for individual students are outstanding. Staff know each student exceptionally well and take swift, appropriate steps when needed to make sure everyone learns as well as they can. Academic guidance is excellent. In addition, the academy's work with other agencies is outstanding. This is leading not only to much improved outcomes for the students, but to productive relationships with parents and the academy's growing standing in the community. The academy makes a very strong contribution to community cohesion in its locality. It is now beginning to develop students' perspectives on national and global issues. One of the governors described the academy's specialism in sport as a 'golden thread' running through all aspects of its work. The specialism brings benefits not only to the health and physical well-being of students but to their personal development, their attitudes to learning and their achievement.

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are keen to develop and refine their professional skills and the academy does much to support them. Students reported that the best thing about the academy is not the stunning new building or the comprehensive sports facilities, but the teaching and learning. 'They really know their stuff', said one, speaking of the teachers, 'and they are pleased to be here'. The curriculum is good and enrichment activities are extensive, ranging from academic subjects, sports, physical activities and the arts, to karaoke and 'boom whackers'.

The principal, staff and governors know, however, that there is still a good deal of work to do. Although standards have risen considerably, they are still low and the students' basic skills in literacy are not yet secure enough to provide a solid platform for future learning. Similarly, although the vast majority of students behave very well both in lessons and around the site, a very small minority continues to present particular challenges. A number of parents who responded to the questionnaire expressed their approval of steps the academy is taking to deal with those who persist in misbehaving.

The academy knows its strengths and weaknesses well. Leaders are rigorous and accurate in checking the quality of teaching and in tracking the students' progress. Records show that students are continuing to make good progress; the gap between the academy's results and national averages is closing. John Madejski Academy has achieved much in a short space of time and has a good capacity to continue to improve.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The sixth form is developing well. Recruitment of students has increased significantly this year, with many joining from other local schools. The sixth form is well led and the capacity for further growth and improvement is good.

The quality of lessons is high and students are very positive about the teaching that they receive. Lessons are very well planned, structured and varied. Teachers provide a wide range of additional support. As a result, sixth-form students are making good progress. Given the academy's inclusive approach, students enter the sixth form with generally low standards. While the standards that they attain are below national averages, they achieve well given their starting points and capabilities.

The sixth-form curriculum is developing and the number of courses, especially at advanced level, has increased significantly this year. A popular football studies programme is also in place. However, the sixth form is small and this inevitably restricts the range of courses that are available. In particular, the number of level 2 courses is limited. As the sixth form grows, leaders are looking carefully at opportunities to extend the range of courses that they offer.

The academy works hard to treat each student as an individual and to meet his or her specific needs. Attainment is closely tracked and additional support and help are provided where necessary. Students' personal development and well-being are good. The students are very positive about the sixth form and they have good attitudes to learning. The academy has impressed on sixth formers the need to act as strong, positive role models to others. Sixth-form students join tutor groups in the main academy and support the school's extra-curricular programme. Many act as sports leaders and help to run sports teams. The students value being given this responsibility and it is helping the academy to raise the aspirations and expectations of students in other year groups.

### What the academy should do to improve further

- Extend the range of courses, particularly at level 2, in the sixth form as numbers increase.
- Embed strategies to develop students' literacy skills across all subjects.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Students' standards on entry to the academy are well below average. The students make good progress and standards have improved significantly since the academy opened although, overall, they remain below average. In 2007, results at Key Stage 3 showed that the students had made good progress. Analysis of the 2008 results is not possible, as the marking is incomplete. However, preliminary results in mathematics and science and the teachers' own assessments indicate that the improving trend has continued. GCSE examination results were very low in 2007, but improved dramatically in 2008 by all measures. Analysis of the unvalidated results indicates that the students made good progress from their very low starting points.

Standards in the specialist subject of physical education have also improved significantly. Around one third of the students in Year 11 last year followed the BTEC Sport Certificate course and all were successful in gaining the equivalent of two higher-grade GCSE passes.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Most students share considerable pride in their academy. Rates of attendance have risen significantly. The number of days lost through exclusion has fallen dramatically, showing that behaviour is improving. However, some low-level disruption occurs in lessons that fail to engage the students' interest. The academy's specialism in sport has had a positive impact on the choices made by many students, both in extra-curricular activities and training that will support their future economic well-being, for example through leadership and membership of teams. Students take seriously the importance of keeping fit and adopting a healthy lifestyle. Amongst the 'Student Voice's' first projects was negotiating changes to the menus. Students feel safe and the academy is an orderly community.

Students are keen to make good progress. Their on-line self-evaluations show that they find work increasingly challenging but are becoming more confident learners with enhanced self-esteem. They feel valued and, in turn, respect those who take on responsibilities, including representing students' views to senior managers and acting as mentors to one another. Older students help younger ones improve their reading and 'Football Studies' students act as role models and mentors to younger students with challenging behaviour. Students benefit from work-related learning through a range of subjects and from work experience, but in many cases weak literacy skills limit their future economic well-being.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

There are considerable strengths in the teaching. Where it is outstanding, the teachers' secure command of their subject, meticulous planning and lively, assured teaching ensures that students are engrossed and make excellent progress. Overall, teachers' plans show that thought is given to making sure that work is pitched at the right level. Lessons are often broken up into short sessions that help the students maintain their concentration and build on what they have learned already. Many teachers also include opportunities to extend students' skills in English in other subjects and in tutor time. Relationships between teachers and students are characterised by mutual respect and there is a clear desire for all students to do well. Students are responding by taking increasing responsibility for their learning, but sometimes they are too passive and happy for others to contribute for them.

Teachers are increasingly confident to try new methods and approaches. Some act as 'literacy champions' to boost students' reading skills and a small team of 'dare devils' pushes the boundaries, trying innovative ways to engage students and boost learning.

There are still some inconsistencies in teaching which the academy is tackling. For example, not all teachers are equally skilled at assessing exactly what students have learned at different points during the lesson.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The academy's good curriculum is helping to support rapid improvements in students' achievement and attitudes to learning. At Key Stage 3, several pathways help meet individual students' needs and abilities. Where needed, students receive intensive support for the development of their basic skills.

At Key Stage 4, students follow an increased range of carefully selected options, based on a thorough analysis of their needs and interests. An increasing number of students follow courses with a local further education provider for part of their time. Timetables are adjusted to ensure that courses at the college and in school match together closely. Although still at a relatively early stage, the academy is enabling students to take GCSE examinations before the end of Year 11, providing opportunities to broaden and extend the curriculum afterwards.

A wide range of curriculum enrichment opportunities is available. Many, although by no means all, relate to the academy's specialist sports status. Take-up is high and is actively encouraged through the academy's diploma programme where, in order to graduate, students must collect points for involvement in extra-curricular activities as well as for their learning.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The breadth and depth of the academy's care, guidance and support for students are impressive. Four 'schools' integrate academic and pastoral support, bringing coherence and focus to the 'one conversation' regularly held about each student. Data are used intelligently to track students' progress and engagement with the life of the academy. Concerns are quickly noted and effective interventions organised. Improved performance and achievement of any kind are celebrated. Academic tutoring is a driving force for progress. Students track their own progress electronically. Parents, too, have access to the information, making home-school communication clearer and leading to the agreement of relevant and manageable targets. Reliable and well-managed data provide a secure foundation for excellent guidance about subject choices and routes to further education, training or employment.

Support for those with challenging behaviour and learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. Varied assessment methods accurately identify challenges and track progress. A substantial team of teachers and specialist support staff provides full-time care and guidance for vulnerable students. Care is taken to develop positive links with families and carers. Collaboration with external agencies is highly effective and complements the expertise of teams within the academy. Safeguarding procedures are thorough.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Strong leadership and effective management have contributed greatly to the academy's successes. The principal's leadership is outstanding. Her unfailingly positive approach has undoubtedly been a major driving force. To her, the students are 'excellent young people' and she has high expectations of them. Students and their teachers are rising to these expectations. The principal's style is to enable and empower others. She has developed and inspired a very strong team of senior and middle leaders, some of whom make an outstanding contribution in

their areas of responsibility. Challenging targets for improvements in teaching, learning and standards are set. When evaluations show that these targets are within reach, they are raised still further. For example, published targets for performance at GCSE were greatly exceeded in 2008, because internal targets were raised in line with improvements in performance. Many parents wrote that they could see that the academy was improving and attributed it to the quality of leadership. Members of the governing body are well informed. They share in the desire for continued improvement and know that this is best achieved through a judicious mix of support and challenge.



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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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/or disabilities make progress	2	

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	3	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	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 school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of John Madejski Academy, Reading, RG2 8AF

Thank you for the welcome you gave me and my colleagues when we inspected your academy recently. We enjoyed the opportunities we had to meet with some of you and to talk with others in lessons. Your views on life and learning at John Madejski formed an important part of the evidence that we used in coming to our conclusions.

Your principal, even before the academy opened in 2006, was strongly determined that you would receive a good education and do as well as you possibly could. She has worked very hard, along with other senior staff, teachers, support staff, governors and you yourselves, to make this happen. We were impressed to see how much has been achieved, and judged that John Madejski is a good and rapidly improving school.

These are the major strengths.

- Test and examination results are rising rapidly and you are making good progress in the main school and the sixth form.
- Attendance is above the national average.
- The care, guidance and support that every student receives is outstanding.
- The sports specialism helps you do well, not only in PE, but in all aspects of academy life.
- Your principal's determination that you will succeed is undiminished and everyone is striving to do even better.

There are, of course, some things that require particular attention. We realise that the sixth form is small and so the curriculum is not as broad as it could be. We have asked the academy to look carefully at developing the curriculum, as numbers of students increase. We are also aware that when some of you start at the academy your skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing are not as strong as they need to be. The academy is going to provide opportunities for you to develop and extend these skills in as many lessons as possible.

I wish you every success in the future,

Yours sincerely

Linda McGill  
Her Majesty's Inspector