

# Grace Academy

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	129342
<b>Local Authority</b>	
<b>Inspection number</b>	331460
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26–27 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Brooker 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)	1138
Sixth form	98
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Robert Edmiston
<b>Principal</b>	Bal Pierpoint
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Chapelhouse Road Chelmsey Wood Birmingham B37 5JS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01213 294600
<b>Fax number</b>	01213 294601

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Grace Academy opened as an 11 to 18 school in September 2006. It has a non-denominational Christian ethos and subject specialisms in business and enterprise. The academy is accommodated in state of the art new buildings adjacent to the site of its 11 to 16 predecessor school. The academy follows Solihull Local Authority's admission policy; it is non-selective and is heavily oversubscribed. It serves the community of Chelmsley Wood, an area that includes districts of high social and economic disadvantage. The majority of students are White British, although a small number come from minority ethnic heritages. The number of students eligible for free school meals is twice the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also well above the national figure. The academy has faced significant staffing difficulties and has experienced a large turnover of teachers. In January 2008, the principal was appointed as executive principal for the Grace Academies and the vice principal took up post as principal. In September 2008, 27 teachers joined the academy, including several in key senior and middle leadership roles.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Grace Academy has achieved much in the two years since it opened. Staff, students and governors are rightly proud of the impressive improvements that their collective efforts have brought about. The academy's overall effectiveness is satisfactory and there are many good features to its work, although much remains to be done to further raise standards and address the challenge presented by the most disaffected students. Nonetheless, the academy's successes in its first two years demonstrate that there is good capacity for further improvement.

When the academy opened in September 2006, it inherited a group of students, many of whom were disaffected, had low attendance and unsatisfactory behaviour. The academy immediately set about transforming attitudes, and quickly established a positive and aspirational ethos based on rigorous self-evaluation and setting challenging targets. Achievement is now satisfactory overall and, although standards remain significantly below the national average, there has been good improvement in results at both Key Stage 3 and at GCSE. Aspirational target-setting has raised the expectations of students and teachers, and has underpinned the academy's success in raising attainment. Given their starting points and the legacy of underachievement, students made particularly good progress in GCSE examinations in 2008.

The improvements in students' personal development, progress and attainment stem from good leadership and a clear vision of what the academy is striving to achieve. The principal and the senior leaders have implemented good systems and procedures that guide the academy's work. Governors are committed and passionate about improving the life chances of students who attend Grace Academy. Students are well cared for and supported, particularly in their academic guidance. Teaching is broadly satisfactory and the good curriculum provides a range of suitable pathways to enable different students to achieve well.

The impact of the academy's good leadership is amply demonstrated. Firstly, standards of attainment have risen significantly in the first two years. Secondly, the quality of teaching has improved and there is an increasing proportion that is securely good, with some that is outstanding. Thirdly, the academy has had real success in tackling the unsatisfactory levels of attendance, poor behaviour and low aspirations that had previously been deeply-rooted barriers to achievement. These improvements have changed the students' attitudes to learning and improved their life chances. Students, staff and parents acknowledge this progress, but they also highlight residual weaknesses. Standards in many subjects remain too low, and the poor behaviour and negative attitudes of a small number of students continue to disrupt the learning and progress of others, particularly in the weaker lessons. Moreover, the persistent absence of a small proportion of students remains an intractable issue, not least because it contributes to the comparatively high number who do not go on to further education, employment or training at the age of 16. Although students make impressive progress in some subjects, achievement is too uneven to be judged as good.

### Effectiveness of the sixth form

#### Grade: 3

Sixth form students make satisfactory progress, although the standards that they attain are below average. Moreover, there is wide variation between the best and worst performing subjects. The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory, although at present it is strongly orientated towards advanced level courses. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and students are aware

of their targets. In the best subjects, the academic guidance is excellent, with exemplary assessment and teachers who give generously of their time to provide further help and support. Students are generally satisfied with the sixth form, but some express legitimate concerns about the quality of teaching in some subjects. They feel that the sixth form prepares them well for further study by providing good opportunities for independent study. Leadership and management are satisfactory and leaders take good steps to ensure that students, some of whom study some subjects at other schools, are properly supported.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards so that more students are better prepared for later life and further study.
- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons in order to accelerate further students' progress.
- Strengthen the personal development of the most challenging and disaffected students, including their behaviour, attitudes and attendance.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Standards of attainment have improved significantly, but they remain well below average. In 2007, only 19% of students achieved five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, and although this figure increased to 28% in 2008, exceeding the academy's challenging target, it was still below the national minimum target for schools. The academy is uncompromising in setting challenging targets in order to increase attainment, but its specialist subjects do not make a significant contribution to raising standards.

When students start at the academy, their standards are generally below those expected for their age, although the attainment on entry of students in Year 7 and Year 8 are more broadly average. Achievement is satisfactory because students make broadly satisfactory progress in relation to their capability and starting points when all subjects and key stages are taken into account. However, there remains significant disparity between the performance of different subjects: achievement is good in English but inadequate in mathematics. Nonetheless, students made impressive progress overall at Key Stage 4 in 2008, particularly given their prior performance at Key Stage 3. Most groups made good progress, notably those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with particularly low levels of prior attainment.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Students are generally happy, feel safe, enjoy coming to school and value the wide range of different opportunities that the academy offers them, particularly for enrichment. There are good relationships between students and with adults, and the vast majority of students behave well and have positive attitudes to their learning. However, there are still a number of recalcitrant or disaffected students in each year group who are reluctant to meet the academy's high expectations. Inconsiderate and occasionally over-boisterous behaviour is evident in corridors, and poor behaviour from a small minority of students disrupts some lessons. In general, the academy deals effectively with challenging behaviour and takes appropriate action to address

instances of bullying when they arise. The number of fixed term exclusions has reduced significantly over the last year, reflecting improvements in ethos and behaviour, and attendance has increased from unacceptably low levels to just below the national figure. Nonetheless, the academy has a significantly high proportion of students who are persistently absent and a small number that regularly arrive late to school. In general, students are well prepared for the next stage of their education and for later life, but the percentage of school leavers who do not go into education, employment or training, although declining, remains comparatively very high.

The development of healthy lifestyles and the students' contribution to their community are particular strengths of their personal development. Students understand the importance of exercise and eating healthily, and have positively influenced the academy's restaurant provision. Mixed age tutor groups encourage students to support one another and ensure, as one student commented, that 'everyone is accepted here'. Many students make a strong contribution to their academy and the wider local community, for example through peer mentoring, the student council and various charitable activities.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

Teachers know their subjects well and lessons generally have a clear purpose, which is well understood by learners. Work is carefully structured, with effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and teachers plan a good range of activities to encourage students to participate actively in lessons. In the best lessons, the pace of learning is brisk, and questioning is used well to challenge students of different ability. There are excellent examples of students assessing their own work against clear criteria, so that they understand in detail how they might improve. Despite this good practice, however, the quality and impact of marking are too variable.

Teachers often have to work hard to motivate students. In most lessons, the students behave well, follow instructions, and apply themselves well to their work. However, attitudes and behaviour are only really good when teaching is at its best. In those lessons which are satisfactory, there is less attention paid to students' different abilities and questions are not used to assess the level of understanding or to identify any misconceptions which subsequent teaching puts right. Some good initiatives are starting to address literacy across the curriculum, but opportunities are not taken to ensure that students' mathematical understanding and expertise are developed sufficiently.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is well designed to cater for the range of abilities and interests of students through different pathways, including a range of suitable vocational and work-related options at Key Stage 4. In Years 7 to 9, for example, students who have not achieved high enough standards in literacy have a greater proportion of English lessons on the timetable, whilst more able students study two modern languages. The academy's specialisms are embedded in the curriculum and the good partnerships with local businesses provide good support for students in several ways. All students in Year 8 and 9 have ICT and business and enterprise lessons, and the opportunity for some to take early GCSE modules in ICT promotes their achievement. The focus on a range of business and enterprise skills, such as team working and risk taking, has

improved the quality of teaching and learning because specific activities are planned in order to consolidate and develop students' skills. There are a number of days devoted to the academy's specialism, and students say that these are enjoyable and enrich their experience. The academy provides a good range of extra-curricular activities, including sport and the performing arts, which attract a reasonable number of students.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The academy cares well for its students and provides good guidance and high quality support. The academy's positive climate, based on sound relationships, promotes well the students' self-esteem, confidence and personal development. All students are well known by staff and the good care and support for learners are seen in the high level of commitment of staff at many levels to encouraging enjoyment and achievement. The academy makes effective use of its rigorous tracking system to monitor students' progress and to inform intervention and support, particularly for those at risk of falling behind. Students receive good quality advice and guidance at key transition points as they move through the academy, and the good links with a wide range of agencies provide good support for students, especially the most vulnerable. The monitoring of attendance is rigorous, although robust procedures have not impacted sufficiently on the most persistent absentees. Suitable child protection arrangements, systems for safeguarding students and risk assessments are in place.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Strong leadership and effective management have contributed greatly to the academy's improvement and successes. Rigorous systems are in place for monitoring performance, and staff at all levels are actively engaged in systematic self-evaluation. The rigorous implementation of management systems, including procedures for line management, ensures that managers at all levels understand their responsibilities and are effectively held to account.

The legacy of underachievement has been tackled well and there have been clear successes in improving the quality of teaching, raising attendance and improving behaviour, which are leading to better progress for the students. The principal and executive principal provide clear strategic direction to the work and development of the academy. This includes a strategy for promoting a cohesive academy community and developing the academy's wider impact on the local community through good local partnerships. Senior leaders have established a positive climate, based soundly on the academy's ethos and values, and have raised the aspirations and widened the horizons of the students.

The governing body is strong, supportive and proactive. Governors give generously of their time and are well informed. They share in the desire for continued improvement and understand the need for a judicious mix of support and challenge. Business partners work closely with the academy to support its work and 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	<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>	3	3
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?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

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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>	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
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>	3	3
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?	2	2

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
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**

28 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Grace Academy, Solihull B37 5JS

Thank you for the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We were impressed by how mature and sensible you were when you spoke with us and the businesslike way that you conducted the formal interviews. Your views, and those of your parents, were very helpful in confirming what staff told us.

- Our own judgements agree closely with those of the academy. There has been good improvement since the academy opened, so that the outcomes for you, in terms of attendance, behaviour, personal development and – crucially – exam results are improving year on year. You have good support, you know your targets well, and are given clear guidance to improve. Much of the teaching is good, particularly when there are strong relationships and lessons are lively and interesting. On the other hand, the pace of learning is sometimes impeded by disrespectful or disruptive behaviour. Achievement is satisfactory overall, but some of your progress is uneven or inconsistent. We were particularly impressed with:
  - the improvement in results at Key Stage 3 and GCSE and, particularly, the progress that Key Stage 4 students made last year
  - the positive contribution that you make to your own community and beyond
  - the wide range of extra-curricular activities that so many of you participate in.

The academy recognises the areas that need strengthening, and we have asked that it focuses particularly on:

- raising standards so that more of you are better prepared for the next stage of education and later life
- increasing the proportion of good and outstanding lessons so that your progress is accelerated
- addressing attendance, challenging behaviour and attitudes that, for many of you, remain a barrier to your good progress and achievement.

You all have a role to play in bringing about improvements, particularly if your attendance is below 90% or if you do not take enough responsibility for your own learning and progress. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector