

Cornwallis Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135371
Local Authority	N/A
Inspection number	345496
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Kekshan Salaria HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1669
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	369
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ray Harris
Headteacher	Dr Chris Gerry (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Hubbards Lane Linton Kent
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspection team spent 24 hours looking at learning, and observed 46 parts of lessons taught by 46 different teachers. Meetings were held with the executive principal, the Chair of the Governing Body and with other members of staff and groups of students. The team observed the academy's work, and looked at a range of documents including information about students' progress and other statistical information, the academy's plan for improvement, departmental reviews and evaluations. In addition, the questionnaires returned by 52 parents, 266 students and 44 members of staff were examined.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's work. It looked in detail at the following:

the effectiveness of teaching in ensuring that it challenges all learners

- the systems for tracking and reviewing students' progress
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in overcoming barriers to engagement, in improving outcomes for students and in contributing to the academy's improvement.

Information about the school

Cornwallis Academy is one of two academies run by the New Line Learning Academies' Trust. Cornwallis and New Line Learning Academies share a governing body, an executive principal and sixth form provision based on the Cornwallis site. Each academy is led on a day-to-day basis by a head of school. The academy has specialisms in science and technology. The construction of a new building is well under way and it is anticipated that it will open in September 2011.

The academy is non selective and larger than the average secondary school with students coming from a varied catchment area. Applications to Year 7 far exceed places available and the sixth form is very large and popular. Students start the sixth form in Year 11. Most of the students are of White British heritage but there is a small number from a range of minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students known to be eligible for a free school meal is below the national average. An above average proportion of students have special educational needs and/or a disability relating mainly to their learning or behaviour. The academy's roll includes a small number of looked after children.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Cornwallis Academy is providing its students with a good standard of education. Some of its features are outstanding, most notably the exciting, innovative curriculum that has been developed and the care, guidance and support which help the students to achieve well. The academy has worked hard to develop a curriculum which is flexible and personalised to meet the needs of all its students. Tailor-made courses have helped to raise the aspirations and confidence of students. Students reach high standards and achieve well in the GCSE examinations. Sixth-form students make similarly good progress. These results reflect the flexibility the academy has developed with early entry for examinations in Year 10 and the opportunity this creates for students to develop their learning and undertake additional courses leading to qualifications. Additionally, the academy sets ambitious targets and challenges each student to recognise what they can achieve.

Achievement is good and standards are above average. Students enter the academy with attainment that varies from year to year, but which is generally below the national average. Low literacy and numeracy levels present a considerable barrier to learning for many students. During their time in the academy, the majority of students make good progress. The percentage of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C rose from 76% in 2008 to 81% in 2009. Particularly noteworthy is the increase in standards in the academy's specialist subjects of design and technology and science. Senior staff have taken action to improve and secure leadership and management in these subjects. The impact can be seen in the dramatic rise in results in GCSE grades A* to C for 2009, design and technology improving from 19% to 45%, and science from 18% to 47%.

Students' progress is good because of the good teaching they receive. Typically, lessons are well planned, and engaging activities ensure that most students are motivated. Students value the support they receive from their teachers, particularly the extra opportunities that are provided outside normal lessons. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they have high expectations of the standards that students should reach. However, although tasks are increasingly varied, too much of the work is set for the whole class and does not fully take into account the needs of different groups.

An atmosphere of good humour and respect pervades the academy. Students' behaviour is good, they get on well together and, within such a positive environment, they feel safe and enjoy their learning. Students make an effective contribution to decision making through the student council and enjoy the varied opportunities to take on responsibilities, work collaboratively and support each other. Effective collaboration with a range of outside agencies makes an important contribution to the high quality support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and this helps them to

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achieve well. Procedures for ensuring students' safety are robust, with very efficient staff recruitment arrangements and clear child protection practices. Students tell the inspection team that they are confident in approaching staff for help if they need it and that the academy's pastoral system works very well for them.

Parents are particularly appreciative of the transition arrangements from Year 6 to Year 7. As one parent commented, 'I thought the way they prepared the new Year 7s for entry to the school was well thought out'. However, not all Year 11 students make the transition to AS and BTEC work confidently. The difference between their skills and those of older students is not always effectively tackled; however, students are emphatic that the benefits outweigh any difficulties.

Underpinning the success of the academy are the effective leadership and management at all levels. Under the successful leadership of the executive principal, the head of the school and senior staff have ensured that this large academy maintains and continues the momentum for improvement. The head of school has fostered a collaborative senior management team whose members have a strong commitment to raising standards. Senior leaders, including the governing body, know the academy well and are clear about the next steps for improvement. The head of school is keen for the academy to be an integral part of the local and wider community. As a result, the academy works very well with other schools, agencies and employers. The academy has good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching further by consistently ensuring that work and support in lessons are more closely matched to the needs of all students.
- To allow students to fully engage in the innovative and inclusive curriculum in Year 11, the academy should seek to embed a robust programme of transition.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students join the academy with attainment below average, particularly so in English and mathematics. By the time they leave, their attainment is above average. The proportion of students gaining five good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics increased from 48% in 2008 to 53% in 2009. In the academy's specialist subjects, attainment has improved substantially. Particularly good support is provided for those students encountering difficult or challenging times. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported, helping them to make good progress.

Students have good attitudes to learning and in many, but not all, lessons their behaviour is exemplary. They persevere with the tasks that are set for them even when they find it difficult and often this tenacity pays dividends, ensuring they make good progress. Staff have created an environment where students are confident to seek help when they need it. Students are supportive of each other; this was seen in the way they help each other in lessons. Attendance rates are good. Students have mature attitudes; they understand the need for additional support and are happy to commit extra time to

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improving their skills, including through online programmes. When given the chance, students demonstrate good independent learning skills and accurate and thoughtful reflection on their own learning.

Students' good understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle is apparent in their choice of food in the food hall and the high participation rates in a wide range of sporting activities. They feel safe in school and are confident that any instances of bullying will be effectively dealt with. Their movement around the academy generally shows consideration for others and they are polite and courteous.

Students are making a good contribution to the local community, including the mentoring of primary school pupils in reading. Students are well prepared for future employment by the strong work-related element to the curriculum that offers team building, enterprise skills and work experience.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The good nature of outcomes in students' attainment, achievement and progress is the result of predominantly good teaching and some outstanding lessons were seen.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Teaching is good because of the following three factors.

Teachers use expert subject knowledge, good planning and well-targeted questioning, which develop students' understanding and higher order thinking skills.

Teachers use a range of teaching styles to engage and challenge students. The academy successfully nurtures a culture where students learn how to learn. In turn, students apply a range of basic and high order skills well across subjects. High expectations enable students to make good progress.

Teachers understand how to structure learning for students, particularly for those who find some aspects of learning difficult, to ensure they also make good progress.

Students make less than good progress when teaching is unimaginative, there is insufficient challenge and work is not matched to students' needs.

Students are very well served by an outstanding, rich and flexible curriculum that meets their needs and aspirations. For example, all students undertake a vocational qualification from a wide choice based on their needs. Progression routes are clear and students say that they like the good range of options that are available to them. There are good opportunities for older students to develop independence and to take responsibility through participation in activities like the academy council and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Additional learning opportunities are provided after school hours and these have a good and committed take-up.

Like the curriculum, the outstanding quality of pastoral care, guidance and support impacts very well on students' personal development. The needs of any students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are fully met and there is extra help and support for these students whenever they need it. The academy works tirelessly with outside agencies to extend support to students and families wherever it can.

Senior leaders have developed robust systems to check that students are making the progress they are capable of. A strong feature of this system is that students' progress is discussed regularly by senior and middle leaders. Students indicate that marking is generally helpful, although the scrutiny of some of the students' books found that some of it could be more specific in guiding them to improve their work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The leadership provided by the head of school is very strong and provides clear direction

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and purpose. He leads the academy with enthusiasm, dedication and a clear commitment to improvement, especially in relation to the progress students make. This is evidenced by the significant improvements in 2009 in the specialist subjects. All staff have responded by matching his drive and ambition and it is their commitment to teamwork and determination to make things happen that is producing so many successes. Senior and middle leaders ensure robust and regular monitoring of teaching and learning, targeted support and coaching, and increasingly regular sharing of good practice both between and within departments. They are particularly aware of the need to ensure consistency across the academy in using assessment for learning to make sure teaching meets the needs of all students, hence reducing the variability in standards across subjects.

Self-review is robust and transparent. A rigorous external review cycle, well-defined line management structures and internal review systems accurately inform identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy.

The academy makes a good contribution to community cohesion. Much is done to strengthen links with the local and wider community. For example, the appointment in September 2009 of a cross-federation community director is enhancing community engagement and is ensuring strategies and incentives between Cornwallis and New Line Learning Academies is coordinated and coherent. World Challenge promotes awareness of the global community for students, parents and carers and the local community. The academy is strongly committed to inclusion, removing barriers to success, and improving the educational outcomes for the students. This illustrates the academy's success in promoting equality of opportunity.

Partnership working is very strong and is evidenced by the wide range of agencies to provide support for students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and to enrich the curriculum for all. The Federation website offers open communication to parents and carers at both Academies. Information regarding the new build is promoted through evening sessions, as is information regarding Year 6 to 7 transition.

The academy's procedures for safeguarding are secure. Checks on new staff are carried out correctly and recorded well.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Exceptional flexibility in the curriculum and outstanding care, guidance and support underpin the academy's effective management of a three-year sixth form. Year 11 students are able to combine additional GCSE subjects with AS and BTEC courses, working alongside Year 12 and Year 13 students. Each student has a study programme well attuned to his or her abilities and aspirations, across an impressively broad spectrum. For some, this stretches to university-level courses in Year 13 after A levels successfully completed in Year 12.

Overall attainment is broadly in line with national averages, and shows an upward trend. Given students' starting points, this reflects good progress, with particular strengths in applied and vocational subjects. Senior managers monitor the progress of individual students and groups rigorously, with prompt and well-targeted intervention to tackle underperformance or loss of momentum.

The majority of teaching is good or better, characterised by confident and enthusiastic subject knowledge, careful planning, a productive rapport with students and constructive use of assessment to support learning.

Students treat each other and adults with courtesy and care, take seriously the need to be healthy and make a positive contribution to the academy, for example as prefects and as mentors for younger students. They benefit from work-based learning, business courses and work within the local community, linked to the academy's specialist status. Students show good interpersonal skills and use modern technology confidently.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A low proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire. Their responses were

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largely positive, in particular in relation to the recent improvements. Parents value the support provided by the academy when their children transfer from primary school. A few parents raised concerns about how well the academy communicates with them. Inspectors investigated these concerns and found that programmes to involve parents in the life of the academy, as well as systems to act on the views of parents were wide ranging, and regularly evaluated in order to improve further. Some parents raised concerns about the quality of students' learning and their progress. Inspectors found that a good deal of attention is given to meeting students' academic needs and their welfare.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cornwallis Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 52 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1669 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	40	27	52	3	6	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	14	27	35	67	3	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	21	40	25	48	2	4	3	6
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	37	29	56	2	4	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	14	27	34	65	3	6	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	21	32	62	5	10	3	6
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	15	31	60	6	12	4	8
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	16	31	23	44	4	8	4	8
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	35	27	52	3	6	4	8
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	15	32	62	11	21	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	15	34	65	3	6	5	10
The school is led and managed effectively	11	21	34	65	2	4	5	10
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	38	24	46	6	12	1	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



8 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Cornwallis Academy, Linton, ME17 4HX

We really enjoyed meeting you. Thank you for talking to us so honestly about the academy and the progress you are making. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection. Your parents or carers will have a copy of the full report should you wish to read it.

The overall effectiveness of the academy, including the sixth form, is good. Leaders and managers are doing a good job in bringing about improvements. You achieve well, examination and test results are improving and standards are rising. We were impressed by your good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Most of you enjoy academy life and appreciate the wide range of extra activities available to you.

You told us you feel very well looked after. You really value the positive relationships you have with each other and with staff. Many of you welcome responsibility and take up the opportunities to make a positive contribution to the academy and the wider community.

Everyone is determined to keep on improving and we talked with the staff and governors about two things they will be working on to help the academy to improve even further.

We suggested that the academy should look at ways to involve you more in lessons, using different approaches and tasks. This will help you achieve by making you think more about your work.

To allow you to fully engage in the innovative and inclusive curriculum in Year 11, the academy should seek to embed a robust programme of transition.

May I take this opportunity, on behalf of the inspection team, to wish you all the very best for your future studies.

Yours sincerely

Kekshan Salaria

Her Majesty's Inspector

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