

The Oxford Academy

Sandy Lane West, Littlemore, Oxford, OX4 6JZ

Inspection dates 9–10 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Too few students gain a grade C or above at GCSE in both English and mathematics.
- The large number of changes in leadership and staffing in mathematics has hindered students' progress. Students are not making as much progress in mathematics as they do in English.
- Development of students' literacy skills is not well supported in lessons by all teachers, and is inconsistent across different subjects.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching have not yet enabled all students to make good enough progress.
- The most able students are not making as much progress as their peers. Teachers are often not ambitious enough for these students and do not give them work that is sufficiently challenging.
- The interim academy board relies overmuch on the considerable expertise of a few members. It does not yet have its full complement of members.
- The academy does not currently have a mechanism for collating the views of parents and feeding back to them on how any concerns are dealt with.
- Sometimes, there is not enough for students to do in lessons and the work is not stimulating or sufficiently challenging. Students then have time to chatter and their progress slows.

The school has the following strengths

- There have been rapid improvements at the academy since the arrival of the new Principal. Staff and students say that they welcome his unrelenting efforts to ensure that every student is valued and has their needs met, whatever their background or ability.
- Strong links are being forged with the community and with students' families.
- In English, where achievement is rising, there is no gap in performance between disadvantaged students and others, nor between boys and girls.
- Students with special educational needs are making good progress and the systems for supporting them are very effective.
- Behaviour is good. The purposeful atmosphere in lessons encourages students to learn well. Around the academy they are calm, polite and cooperative. Students are proud of their school.
- The care for vulnerable students is exceptional. The academy is very creative in finding ways to support students and their families. As a result, attendance, behaviour and achievement are all improving.
- Sixth form students make good progress at the off-site provision at Oxford United Football Club and Virtual Learning UK.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 42 lessons to observe the progress and engagement of students. Of these, 23 sessions were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team or a middle leader. Inspectors also visited some lessons for short periods to look at behaviour, literacy, and provision for students with special educational needs. They also observed the behaviour and conduct of students at lesson changeover and at break times, and attended an assembly.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, senior leaders, middle leaders, members of the interim academy board and teachers new to the profession. One inspector interviewed leaders from the off-site sixth form provision, Virtual Learning UK.
- Inspectors talked to students in class and formally met with a group of students with special educational needs. They also met with some students from each year group.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation about the academy’s view of its own performance, improvement plans, and records of checks on the quality of teaching. They also examined information about students’ progress, attainment, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- They also considered evidence about how effectively the academy spends additional funding (known as pupil premium) and Year 7 catch-up funding.
- One inspector visited the off-site sixth form provision at Oxford United Football Club and talked to staff and students there.
- Inspectors looked at a range of students’ work in lessons.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted’s Parent View questionnaire, but inspectors took account of the academy’s own surveys of parent views.
- The inspection team considered 122 questionnaires completed by members of staff.

Inspection team

Mary Massey, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Helen Bailey	Additional Inspector
Janet Simms	Additional Inspector
Alun Williams	Additional Inspector
Glen Goddard	Additional Inspector
Howard Dodd	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- The Oxford Academy is larger than the average comprehensive school with a sixth form. It serves an area of significant social disadvantage. Just under half of students are from among the most deprived wards in the country. There is relatively high movement of students in and out of the academy in comparison with that found nationally.
- The academy is sponsored by the Beecroft Trust, the Diocese of Oxford, and Oxford Brookes University.
- The large majority of students are of White British heritage and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is just below that found nationally.
- There are many more boys in the academy than girls. More than half the students on roll are supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding to support students known to be eligible for free school meals, and looked after children). This is almost twice the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is well above the national average.
- Forty students are currently eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding. This is funding for students who did not achieve Level 4 (the nationally expected level) in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- The academy has four teaching appointments that are funded jointly with Cherwell School.
- No students from Years 7 to 11 attend alternative provision.
- The academy works in partnership with Oxford United Football Club and Virtual Learning UK, which both offer full-time off-site sport-based courses for sixth form students. Over 80% of students registered in the sixth form are taught by these two providers.
- The academy met the government's floor standards in 2013, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- At the time of this inspection, the Principal had been in post for just over two terms. The academy's leadership team has recently been restructured, leading to a major reduction in its size.
- The governing body has been temporarily replaced by an interim executive board, which is called the interim academy board. This small group is already expanding and plans to form a full governing body before the end of this academic year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in order to raise attainment and increase rates of progress in all subjects, and especially in mathematics, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - are more ambitious, set high expectations and expect more of students, particularly the most able
 - continue to close the gap in performance between disadvantaged students and their peers
 - provide work that stimulates students to learn, and is sufficiently challenging for all abilities
 - develop students' literacy skills more consistently across different subjects, with a particular focus on improving their writing.
- Find an urgent long-term and sustainable resolution to the budget deficit, so that there is minimum impact on the quality of provision for students at the academy, and the rapid progress currently being made can continue.
- Develop the interim academy board so that it can become a full and complete governing body, while retaining the current levels of expertise.
- Create a mechanism for capturing the views of all parents, and feeding back to them on how their concerns are dealt with.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The new Principal has brought a very clear vision to the academy, providing a very clear role model for staff, and high expectations of both them and students. A resolute approach to ensuring the best possible experience and maximum progress for every student, no matter their ability or background, has started to lead to improved performance. Students and staff appreciate and value his total commitment to the local community as well as to the academy. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring equality of opportunity. One student said, 'He cares about all of us.' Staff describe a move towards a culture where there is a great deal of support to improve, but where they are also tightly held to account.
- The leadership team has been reduced in size, with clarified roles and responsibilities. Communication with staff has improved, and the team is more efficient. The skills of the majority of middle leaders are developing well, and they are having a positive impact on students' achievement in many subjects. Heads of department have enthusiastically taken on increased responsibility for analysing assessment information, coaching other members of staff, and monitoring the quality of teaching.
- The high numbers of disadvantaged students are looked after well. The academy has struck a good balance between providing very personalised provision, such as laptops and internet access, and meeting staffing needs in specific areas such as mathematics. As the result of a wide range of successful initiatives, the rates of progress in English and mathematics have both increased. The 2014 GCSE results show that there is a very small gap in performance of these students relative to others in English, with a substantial improvement since 2013. In mathematics the gap remains too wide.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Additional literacy lessons for students in Year 7 are beginning to have a positive effect on students' reading skills. Reducing the number of work-related courses offered in Years 10 and 11 affected the proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, in 2014. It does, however, better match the needs of students taking further and higher education. High-quality information, advice and guidance about future pathways for post-16 students mean that they are following the right courses in Years 10 and 11.
- In response to a legacy of poor teaching and underachievement for the current Years 10 and 11, the academy is providing extra staffing for them in English, mathematics and science. The smaller group sizes and individual support are being used well, having a very positive effect on the rate of progress, which is increasing.
- The academy has positive relationships with parents. Their opinions are collected regularly at parents' evenings, with the vast majority responding that they are happy with the academy's provision. Parents are very confident that the academy will deal with their concerns, that their children are safe, and that students make good progress. The main concerns of a few parents are about homework and the management of behaviour. However, these surveys do not capture the views of all parents and there is currently no mechanism for feedback on how the academy has dealt with any concerns.
- All legal requirements for safeguarding students are met.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The interim executive board meets very regularly. The members have considerable expertise and are well aware of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done next. They provide invaluable support for the Principal, whilst offering considerable challenge. For example, when looking at the academy's self-evaluation they questioned the accuracy of the assessment information provided. As a result, tests, especially in English and mathematics, are either fully marked or checked by expert teachers outside the school. This has made the academy's predictions and knowledge of how well students are doing much more reliable.
 - Members visit the academy frequently, going into lessons and finding out about the work of middle and senior leaders. They have a very clear understanding of the quality of teaching and have used external expertise to ensure that the academy's view is accurate. In meetings, the governors regularly monitor progress against the academy's raising achievement plan, including the impact of professional development on performance. Minutes of these meetings record discussion and highlight members' awareness of performance management arrangements and their link to teachers' pay.
 - The interim executive board does not yet have its full complement of members. It is currently a small group, including a staff representative and a recently co-opted member from the local authority. Two parent governors will join shortly.
 - The academy has a substantial budget deficit as a result of historical staffing arrangements, a falling roll

and a projected drop in funding. This is threatening to undermine the rapid progress that has been made since the new Principal was appointed. The interim academy board is working hard to find a way to resolve this with the Principal, the sponsors and the Department for Education.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Students say that it has transformed over the past year. The atmosphere in school is very calm, but relaxed. Staff on duty maintain a genial but firm manner, which ensures that boundaries are very clear and students feel secure. Students say that the rules are consistently applied and they know exactly which behaviour is unacceptable and what the consequences of misbehaviour will be. They wear their uniform with pride and take exceptionally good care of the environment. At the end of lunchtime there is almost no litter on the academy site.
- Students are cooperative, and ready and willing to learn. Sometimes, when there is not enough for them to do, or the work is not stimulating or is insufficiently challenging, students tend to chatter and their progress slows. However, they generally respond to correction quickly. Lesson referrals for poor behaviour are falling sharply, as is the rate of exclusions.
- Students say that the reward system of credits is not consistently applied by teachers and is used better in the younger year groups than older ones.
- Attendance is improving and is currently just above the national average. A programme of home visits and family mentoring to improve attendance has begun to make a difference, particularly in respect of disadvantaged students. The school provides breakfast, and 'the yellow bus' arrangement brings some students into school each day. Regular visits are made to those students who are persistently absent.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students say they feel safe and that older students look after younger ones. They can explain very clearly how to keep themselves safe, both in and out of school. They are aware of how to use the internet safely, and the risks of revealing personal information.
- On the rare occasions that bullying occurs it is handled very effectively. Students are quite clear that there will be a serious response from the academy if, for example, there is any racism or homophobia. They feel very confident to report issues to staff because they know they will be dealt with properly.
- The academy's record of staff recruitment checks is carefully maintained and all members of staff receive regular training in child protection.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The academy is firmly focused on improving the quality of teaching in every year group. Whilst inadequate teaching has been almost eradicated, teaching is not yet typically good overall. A comprehensive and regular programme of professional development has been introduced for all staff, with additional personalised support for some teachers. They have responded with enthusiasm.
- Assessment information shows very clearly that students' academic progress is rising as a result of improved teaching. However, this is not yet consistent across all staff and within all subjects. Although the impact of the training programme is evident in lessons, teaching is not yet firmly good enough to enable all students to make more rapid progress.
- Lower ability students and those with special educational needs are well catered for in lessons; this is reflected in the better progress they make.
- Lesson observations and evidence from students' books show that the most able students do not make enough progress over time because teachers' expectations of what they are capable of achieving are too low.
- With levels of literacy on entry to the academy so low, teachers are expected to reinforce students' skills in all lessons. Again, this is inconsistent across different subjects. The deterioration in the quality of students' writing over time, when subject teachers do not make literacy a marking priority, is evident in exercise books. The mathematics department is aware of the need to introduce a similar policy across the academy for numeracy.
- Teachers generally mark work regularly in line with academy policy. Students often find their comments helpful, particularly in English, so they know what to do to improve. However, this is not applied

consistently in every subject or by every teacher. Comments are not always legible or understandable by those who cannot read well. Opportunities for students to respond to marking vary from subject to subject.

- Students in Years 10 and 11 have suffered a long legacy of underachievement as a result of poor teaching. In these year groups, especially in English and mathematics, students need extra help if they are going to do as well as they should at GCSE. Their assessments in English and mathematics are marked externally in order to ensure accuracy. The results are then carefully analysed and teachers use this information to make sure that teaching concentrates on the weakest areas and on the students who need most help.
- The academy has a relatively high number of teachers new to the profession. They say they benefit through receiving extensive support and guidance from some excellent teachers within the academy.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Attainment on entry to the academy is exceptionally low. Indications from the 2014 GCSE results are that lower ability students, who form almost half the Year 11 group, made good progress from their starting points, in both English and mathematics. Boys make good progress in English, and their performance matches that of girls.
- Although the proportion of students gaining A* to C grades in English or mathematics has risen substantially since 2012, too few students have gained grade C or above in both mathematics and English.
- Changes to the curriculum in favour of academic rather than vocational subjects make comparisons of students' overall attainment over time unreliable. In the past the academy has neglected tackling improvement in other GCSE subjects, focusing instead on English and mathematics. Current information shows that this year there has been a substantial increase in attainment in drama, French, history and geography, but not in other subjects.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress in all year groups. Teachers are now increasingly aware of the importance of meeting these students' specific needs in lessons and making sure that these students are given work that is challenging but not beyond their capabilities. 'Student passports' give teachers helpful strategies for each individual, and when these are used well, students make faster progress in lessons. However, their use is not yet consistent across the academy.
- Two thirds of students arrive at the school in Year 7 with reading skills below those expected for their age. A high proportion of students in other year groups also have difficulty reading. The academy has introduced a range of strategies to tackle this issue at the start of this academic year, and they are already beginning to make a difference. The weakest readers are making very rapid progress because teaching assistants and teachers have a better knowledge of how to teach letters and sounds. There is still work to do to improve students' comprehension.
- The progress made by the most able students requires improvement. Teachers do not make enough demands on them or provide work that is sufficiently stimulating and challenging. In lessons they frequently do not complete enough work and it is often too easy.
- The academy has a very secure system to ensure the accuracy of the assessment information collected about students' attainment and progress in Years 10 and 11, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Senior leaders are now very confident that this information is reliable. They know which students are at risk of underachieving at GCSE in 2015 and plan very carefully to make sure the right support is provided to prevent this.
- The attainment of disadvantaged students is improving in English. In 2013, the gap in performance between these students and other students nationally was the equivalent of a whole GCSE grade, but they were only half a grade behind by comparison with their peers in the academy. This gap has since closed substantially, students in Year 11 having benefited from good teaching and more personalised support.
- In mathematics, disadvantaged students were the equivalent of one GCSE grade behind their peers in 2013. This gap remained in 2014, although they made good progress from their starting points. Substantial staff turnover and poor teaching over several years had led to underachievement of those students now starting Year 11. They have since made good progress because the quality of teaching and support has improved.
- The academy has abandoned its previous practice of entering all students early for some GCSE examinations. However, some students, regardless of ability, are still entered early when a very

personalised assessment indicates this is in their best interests.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form is good. The very large majority of students in the sixth form follow BTEC sports courses that are delivered off site. Those attending Oxford United Football Club complete GCSE mathematics and English at the academy. Virtual Learning UK provides its own English and mathematics GCSE or functional skills courses.
- The students make good progress on these courses, and their success rate is high. Each individual student's progress is monitored very regularly by the staff at the academy to pick up any underperformance.
- Collaboration between the academy and the external providers is well established and very effectively managed. Academy staff make regular visits to ensure that the quality of teaching is high and safeguarding arrangements are secure.
- Students are highly motivated and very positive about both off-site courses. This is evident from the high rates of attendance, which are well above the national average, and the low drop-out rate. About 60% of these students go on to higher education, with others taking on apprenticeships or employment. They describe their teachers as helpful in making very clear what they need to do to improve.
- The sixth form curriculum at the academy is largely work related, with a very few students on A- and AS-level courses. Achievement on the work-related courses is good, but requires improvement on the academic courses. The academy has improved the quality of information, advice and guidance for Year 11 students, and achievement has improved in 2014 because students are attending the right courses.
- Leaders and managers regularly track students' progress. Extra support is provided for students who fall behind. They value this and say they receive good quality care and helpful information, advice and guidance for their future education or employment.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135675
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	447694

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,273
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	560
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	John Putt
Principal	Niall McWilliams
Date of previous school inspection	28–29 November 2012
Telephone number	01865 774311
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