

RSA Academy

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 135599 |
| Local Authority | Not applicable |
| Inspection number | 364392 |
| Inspection dates | 9–10 February 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | David Jones 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 | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1076 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 131 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Sir Michael Tomlinson |
| Headteacher | Michael Gernon |
| Date of previous school inspection | 31 March 2010 |
| School address | Bilston Road Gospel Oak, Tipton DY4 0BZ |
| Telephone number | 0121 5561351 |
| Fax number | 0121 506 7833 |
| Email address | enquiries@rsaacademy.org |

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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 56 lessons, taught by 55 teachers. Meetings were held with the principal, nominated staff, members of the governing body. HMI held a joint meeting conference call with members of the governing body and had an additional conference call with the chair of governors, and met with the school improvement partner from the Department for Education. Inspectors observed the academy's work, looked at a wide range of documentation and met with groups of students. The inspection team reviewed 282 questionnaires returned by parents and carers. A total of 250 student and 52 staff questionnaires were evaluated.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the academy's. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The nature of the improvement secured in standards and achievement since the academy opened in September 2008.
- The accuracy of the academy's evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning.
- The balance of curriculum provision available in all key stages.

Information about the school

The academy is larger than the average secondary school and draws students from the heart of Sandwell. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is a third of the national figure and the proportion of those speaking English as an additional language is very low. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average.

The proportion of students registered by the academy as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is just below the national figure, although the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is less than half the national average. There is a small number of children who are looked after by the local authority. The academy opened in 2008 in the buildings of its predecessor school and moved into new accommodation in September 2010.

The academy specialisms are health and citizenship. It is sponsored by the RSA (The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) and has joined the Microsoft Academy Programme. The academy has received the following national accreditations: Healthy Schools Status (Gold), International Baccalaureate World School Status, the International Schools Award, the Eco Schools Award (Green Flag), and Investors in People (Bronze).

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

1

Main findings

This is a good school. Care, guidance and support are outstanding and so is the leadership and governance of the academy. Four of the seven prime outcome judgements are outstanding. These include students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, the students' adoption of healthy lifestyles, feeling safe and their positive contribution to the community. In addition, attendance levels are high and have risen significantly since the academy opened.

Achievement and the extent to which students enjoy their learning are good. Standards are rising rapidly and are average overall. Results in English and mathematics have improved significantly but remain below the national average and the subject of a great deal of work within the academy. The strengths evident in health and citizenship, the academy's two specialist areas, have been significant factors in rising vocational standards. Students make good progress overall. The outcomes of vocational courses provided in science are exceptionally high. However, students' progress in English was below average in 2010 and their corresponding progress in mathematics was significantly below average. Students with, special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress overall as a result of the impact of well-judged intervention strategies and the students' positive attitudes to learning. The small numbers of students who represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds, those vulnerable due to their circumstances and those who find learning difficult make good progress. The academy has worked hard since opening, to address the weaknesses in the students' previous learning. Teaching is good overall. The use of assessment to enhance teaching and learning is good but not outstanding because the more-able students are not always sufficiently challenged. Marking is good and some exceptional practice was seen.

The curriculum opportunities provided are good with significant breadth of provision. Well-conceived intervention strategies have proved successful in addressing the shortcomings identified in the students' previous education. The key competencies approach of the 'Opening Minds' programme promoted by the Royal Society of Arts, the academy's sponsors, is used well in the better lessons. Curriculum provision for students aged 13-19 is being refined to provide more GCSE courses and vocational courses. The International Baccalaureate is being developed, to secure clear progression into the effective and rapidly growing sixth form. The curriculum planning to increase students' skills in English and mathematics in all subjects is less strong. The development of students' literacy skills in other subjects was a significant factor in the better lessons, however some students were constrained because they did not have the subject specific vocabulary they needed across the curriculum subjects to develop their understanding of different concepts.

The care, welfare and guidance provided are excellent. Parents and carers, as well as students, are full of praise for the wide range of support available. Senior staff use the

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academy's robust assessment database particularly well to refine the intervention strategies and academic support. The academy has a strong track record of nurturing disengaged individuals back in to education. Academic guidance is a notable feature of the strongest teaching.

The governing body and the leadership team have done outstandingly well to conceive, build and move into impressive facilities. The academy has worked hard since opening, to address the weaknesses in the students' previous learning. Evidence from this inspection confirms the findings of the academy's robust monitoring of teaching and learning. Self-evaluation is accurate and the leadership team has done very well to secure significant improvements in academic standards, teaching and learning, equality of provision, the sixth form, behaviour and attendance. This demonstrates the academy's outstanding capacity to improve further. Inspectors received many positive comments from parents and carers during this inspection. One comment summed up the views of many, 'I feel as if the teaching at this school is not just about education. It is about values, belief and the future.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve levels of attainment and progress in English and mathematics by consolidating literacy and numeracy developments within the Key Stage 3 'Opening Minds' provision by:
 - creating a stronger link between key competencies and subjects and enriching subject-based vocabulary as a basis for securing conceptual understanding.
- Further refine the curriculum, particularly for English and mathematics, in order to improve GCSE outcomes and secure the progression for students aged 13 - 19, with the development of International Baccalaureate (IB) provision.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment on entry has been below average but is rising. Academic standards at the end of Year 11 have been rising since the academy opened. At 95%, the proportion of students securing five A*-C grade GCSE was significantly above the national average. However, the proportion of such higher grade GCSE passes that included English and mathematics was just 45%. Although this represents a notable improvement on the previous year, it remains below the national average.

Standards in science have risen significantly, with 94% of the whole cohort securing a higher grade pass. Provisional data for 2011, derived from early entries to examination courses point to a continued trend of improvement in the core subjects. The examination results secured by students known to be eligible for free school meals were similar to their peers overall but notably weaker for English and mathematics. Students make good progress overall.

The students' current learning and performance in the classroom mirrors the improvement shown by the most recent examination results. In the majority of lessons, students make good progress and clearly enjoy their work. The students' positive attitude to learning was a key factor in all lessons. Outcomes are strongest where there is a clear focus on what the students are expected to learn and students respond well to this challenge. In an outstanding Year 11 mathematics lesson, the teacher ensured students understood and

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could use the methodology and mathematical language required for an algebra task. The students worked briskly through the task in pairs, accurately using mathematical terms to complete the task to a high level. The task was very well planned to match the students' learning needs and related questioning was particularly skilful.

Students, parents and carers are very positive that students feel very safe in school and inspectors observed very good staff/student relationships to support this view. The school provides outstanding support for a healthy lifestyle; a wide range of school meals is available and all students receive a free nutritious breakfast daily. Students noted that guidance on sexual relationships and drugs education is good, and the proportion of students engaged in sport is high. The students' contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding through the extensive range of opportunities for students to engage in the academy and the local community such as student leaders and in the 'student parliament'.

The students' workplace and other skills are good and they bring positive attitudes and high rates of attendance to their work placements. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The respect for the ideas and values of their peers was evident in a well-conceived discussion in science on the role of environmental charities in monitoring human activity.

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 | 3 |
| 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 | 1 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |

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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How effective is the provision?

The very good working relationships established between staff and students build confidence. As a consequence, the majority of students have very positive attitudes to learning. The common features that contribute to good and sometimes exceptional learning are underpinned by teachers' high expectations and detailed planning to take account of the students' individual learning needs. In the better lessons, pace and challenge are well matched to students' abilities and the range of activities ensure that students make rapid progress. Most lessons are well planned and the more-able students are not always challenged as much as they could be to reach their full potential. The quality of teaching was less effective when the interrelationships between skills, competencies and the subject element are not clearly defined. Teachers' use of assessment to enhance learning is good. Work is marked regularly. Excellent practice provides clear formative comments that help students make further progress, although this is not consistent in all subjects.

The wide range of vocational courses provided has been a feature of the academy's success to date. However, the curriculum in English and mathematics has not proved sufficiently strong to secure good student progress; senior staff have adjusted teaching, interventions and support to match the curriculum to the students' learning needs. Modern foreign language provision has been rebuilt and the first students will take public examinations in 2011. The 'Opening Minds' provision is delivered through the academy's 'academic schools' structure; for example, mathematics, science and technology and lessons in Years 7 and 8 are delivered within a key competences-based approach which focuses on investigation as well as the use and application of knowledge. Where students made slower progress in these lessons, subject specific language/skills were underdeveloped and this hindered their conceptual understanding.

Students have a very positive view of the academy and what it provides for them. As one Year 7 boy explained to an inspector, 'It's good here Mister. It's like living in a hotel.' Students comment that they feel very secure and can ask any adult for support. They value the role of their older peers who act as 'student advisors' and they appreciate the small, vertically arranged tutor groups. Strong multi-agency work has significantly reduced the risk of exclusion, and students with a history of disengagement have been successfully reintegrated into examination courses.

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 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 1 |

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How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leaders have embedded ambition and driven improvement exceptionally well since the last inspection. Leadership has strength at all levels because of the house and academic school structure. As a result, a great deal has been achieved in a short time, not least a smooth transfer into new accommodation. All of the staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire stated they felt proud to be a member of staff at the academy. Community cohesion is outstanding with many connections to commercial companies and universities facilitated by the Royal Society of Arts, the academy sponsors, and a strong international aspect to the provision.

Senior staff accompanied inspectors in 27 joint-observation of teaching; the views they expressed consistently concurred with the judgements given by inspectors. Equality of opportunity is good but not outstanding because of the variations in performance in some teaching groups and between boys and girls. Governance is outstanding with a clear focus on enhancing provision at every level and an accurate view of the academy's strengths and areas for development. The strength of the relationship between the governing body and Fellows of the Royal Society of Arts has helped to enhance provision. For example, visiting academics helped staff refine the provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in 2010. The school's safeguarding procedures are outstanding and safe staff recruitment is a strength. Engagement with parents and carers is good.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|--|----------|
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers | 2 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 2 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 2 |

Sixth form

The sixth form provision is successful and growing. Students make good progress overall and outcomes have improved. Results are strongest in vocational courses. Students' performance is closely monitored and current assessment information indicates that most

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are on track to achieve their targets. Students value the good working relationships established with their teachers and the support they are given.

Teaching is good and the quality of learning has been strengthened through a strong focus on developing independent learning skills. However, this is not consistent across all subjects. Students are well-motivated and articulate. They have good personal skills which are enhanced by the wide range of enrichment opportunities. For example, all students are expected to take a leadership role. Consequently, they make an outstanding contribution to the academy and the wider community. Improvements in curriculum pathways, which include the International Baccalaureate, and in advice and guidance, ensure that students are well matched to their courses.

These are the grades for the sixth form

| | |
|--|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the sixth form | 2 |
| Taking into account: | 2 |
| 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

The parental questionnaires provide an illustration of the positive views parents and carers expressed about the academy and what it provides for their children. These positive comments were highlighted by the 98% of parents who felt the academy keeps their children safe, a view fully supported by the students. Just over 10% of those parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed reservations with how the academy deals with unacceptable behaviour. Similarly a quarter of the pupil questionnaires expressed concerns on this matter. Inspectors found clear evidence that the number of exclusions has declined significantly and were impressed by the good behaviour they saw in lessons and around the academy. Those pupils interviewed by inspectors were notably more positive on behaviour and the academy's high expectations.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at RSA 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 282 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1076 students registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|---|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 86 | 30 | 168 | 60 | 20 | 7 | 8 | 3 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 131 | 46 | 145 | 51 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| My school informs me about my child's progress | 111 | 39 | 155 | 55 | 14 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 105 | 37 | 165 | 59 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 106 | 38 | 157 | 56 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 94 | 33 | 171 | 61 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 83 | 29 | 184 | 65 | 10 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 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) | 97 | 34 | 167 | 59 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 87 | 31 | 177 | 63 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 105 | 37 | 144 | 51 | 24 | 9 | 5 | 2 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 58 | 21 | 186 | 66 | 25 | 9 | 3 | 1 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 102 | 36 | 158 | 56 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 1 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 119 | 42 | 150 | 53 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 |

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 all 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

| Type of school | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
| | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 59 | 35 | 3 | 3 |
| Primary schools | 9 | 44 | 39 | 7 |
| Secondary schools | 13 | 36 | 41 | 11 |
| Sixth forms | 15 | 39 | 43 | 3 |
| Special schools | 35 | 43 | 17 | 5 |
| Pupil referral units | 21 | 42 | 29 | 9 |
| All schools | 13 | 43 | 37 | 8 |

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



11 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of RSA Academy, Tipton, DY4 0BZ

I have had the pleasure of visiting the academy twice in the last year and wanted to tell you how impressed the inspection team was with your attendance, behaviour, and the progress you have made. The impressive way you conduct yourselves as you move around your wonderful new building and the mature way you all take breakfast together is an example of the good behaviour inspectors observed.

The inspectors judged the academy to be good and there were many outstanding features. Perhaps the most impressive was the care, guidance and support provided for you by the staff. Teaching is good; so is the progress you make overall and the standards you reach are in line with the national average. Results in English and mathematics need to improve and you can play your part by focusing on the accuracy of your work in these subjects.

I have asked the principal and the governing body to help you to improve your English and mathematics and to further refine the curriculum to help you increase your standards in GCSEs.

Thank you for the way in which you welcomed the inspection team into your academy and the courtesy you showed us as we moved around the building.

I shall follow the news of your future successes with real interest.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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