

Preston School Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136894
Local authority	N/a
Inspection number	397490
Inspection dates	24–25 April 2012
Lead inspector	Deborah Zachary

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	938
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Oliver Wilson-Chalon
Headteacher	Tony Bloxham
Date of previous school inspection	N/a
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Introduction

Inspection team

Deborah Zachary Additional inspector

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Phil Taylor Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 34 lessons or parts of lessons, observing 28 different teachers. Meetings were held with a group of governors including the Chair, the Principal and other leaders and managers, and with groups of students. Inspectors observed the academy's work, and looked at a range of documentation including data from the academy's tracking of progress, policies and planning, safeguarding information and records of behaviour. They studied written work from students of a range of abilities. They also scrutinised questionnaires returned by 812 students, 42 staff and 233 parents and carers. The online questionnaire (Parent View) was not used as there were insufficient responses.

Information about the school

Preston School Academy is of average size for a secondary school. It became an academy on 1 July 2011, but retains its specialism in business and enterprise. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Most students are of White British heritage and very few speak English as an additional language. There is an average proportion of disabled students and those supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. In some year groups, significant numbers of students have joined the academy after Year 7. A very few students receive alternative provision, for example medical provision or through attending a pupil referral unit, or take some of their courses at a college.

The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for achievement. It holds a range of awards, including the National Standard for Excellence in Enterprise and the Full International Schools Award.

There is a nursery on the same site as the academy. It is independently managed and was not included in this inspection.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Students achieve well and GCSE results are above average. It is not yet outstanding because teachers do not always ensure that they use the time available to get a good balance of activities in lessons and that students are fully challenged to excel. As a result, learning occasionally slows down.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs now do outstandingly well thanks to very close tracking of their progress and timely and very effective support. In English, the most able students make satisfactory progress, but it is slower than the progress made by other groups.
- Teaching is mostly good. Some is satisfactory and some is outstanding. The challenge for the academy is to turn more satisfactory teaching to good, and good to outstanding. Where teaching is at its best, work is finely tuned to meet the needs of all the abilities in the class, and teachers stretch students' understanding through probing questions. In weaker lessons, students sometimes sit listening for too long.
- Behaviour is good. Students often behave very well, but they sometimes lose concentration when they are not actively involved and interested by the teaching. They feel very safe and respond very well to the excellent way in which their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted. The academy looks after them very well.
- Good leadership of teaching has led to improvements in the work of individual teachers. Leaders use performance data very well to identify the specific aspects of the academy's work that need improvement, and follow the resulting plans through effectively. The excellent curriculum has a strong academic emphasis. The business and enterprise work is a great strength and students have many opportunities to take part in additional activities.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress of the most able students in English by:
 - providing students and teachers with annotated examples of students' work at the highest levels, in order to raise expectations
 - ensuring teachers take every opportunity to provide students with advice through marking on how to move up a grade or level.
- Raise satisfactory teaching to good by improving the balance and use of lesson time, ensuring that:
 - students spend a high proportion of the lesson actively engaged in learning
 - appropriate time is provided for review and reflection.
- Raise good teaching to outstanding through fine-tuning the challenge offered to students of different abilities, including through:
 - the match of work to the different abilities of students
 - probing questions that encourage reflection at the highest level.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment on entry is average and students reach above average standards in their GCSEs before they leave. Standards are rising steadily. Progress is good at both key stages and there is no difference in progress between boys and girls, or between students from different ethnic backgrounds. The progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs is now exceptional. In English, the proportion of students receiving support at school action plus who make expected progress is nearly double the national average. In mathematics it is even higher. Their accelerated progress means they are narrowing the gap in relation to all students nationally. Changes to group sizes for English and mathematics have had a positive impact on the learning of students of a range of abilities, but more-able students are still making slower progress than other groups in English.

Students read fluently, and the reading culture is very effectively promoted. The new reading sessions in Year 7 have an excellent learning atmosphere, as students sit or lean on beanbags and cushions and read avidly from carefully chosen material. They are making rapid progress in developing not just basic skills but also more advanced aspects such as inferring or deducing information that is not explicit in the texts. Students use literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills well across a range of subjects. Students from both ends of the ability spectrum are encouraged to produce extended writing, and the work of those who have special educational needs shows they have benefited from a focus on key technical

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words. Written work is usually neat and well organised, reflecting good attitudes to learning. During the inspection there were examples of students taking responsibility for their progress, for instance in lessons in modern foreign languages. Here they identified their own learning objective for the lesson from a list of targets for different abilities, and reviewed how well they had done, often with sensible advice from other students.

In some satisfactory lessons learning slows when students listen to the teacher for a long time without being expected to engage individually. Sometimes only a few students volunteer answers, and others find that when they start to do written work they have not taken in some of the key things the teacher has told them. As a result they need further support and take longer to move on in their learning.

Quality of teaching

Teachers' subject knowledge is good and their planning is well structured, with intended learning outcomes clearly identified. They plan time for plenary sessions, often at the start and end of lessons, but where teaching is less than good the timing occasionally goes awry. The introductions become too long and students do not have enough opportunities to work individually or reflect on and review what they have done. Students feel they are mostly well taught but in discussions they showed a lack of enthusiasm for these features of weaker lessons. In the best lessons teachers make the most of opportunities to draw ideas together, whether as a 'mini plenary' during the lesson or at the end. In an outstanding chemistry lesson, highly focused and challenging questions from the teacher ensured students had a thorough understanding of why each stage of a practical session had happened as it did, and were able to relate this to the chemistry of the reaction they were studying.

Another characteristic of the best lessons is the way in which the level of work and the approach to learning are adapted very carefully to meet students' individual needs. In an excellent history lesson about the civil rights movement, the teacher's acute awareness of the attainment of each student meant that the independent work demanded of each individual was highly challenging. As a result they focused exceptionally well and developed a deep understanding of the issues involved. The teaching of disabled students and those with special educational needs is often particularly effective in the way it interests and engages them. In a withdrawal session for students needing support for literacy, a rich variety of approaches motivated the students as they produced a video, and they learned much about personal skills including teamwork. In general where teaching is good, tasks are interesting and students are engaged well. Pace is rapid, but sometimes teachers do not fully exploit opportunities to really challenge every ability group.

A study of students' work showed that the comparatively new system of marking, using a stamp of a star to give different facets of information, is working well where it is established. It ensures students are given advice, and respond to that advice. In English, opportunities are sometimes missed to give students clear written guidance on exactly how work would have to be improved to hit a higher level. More-able

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students do not have the benefit of annotated examples to show the key characteristics of work at the highest levels or grades. In the English lessons observed, work was pitched at a broadly appropriate level but teachers did not always have high expectations of the standards the most able in the class could reach.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parental questionnaires and those from the students show that they feel very safe in school. In discussions, students reiterated this view. They understand about bullying of different types, although they are more confident in talking about their anti-racist views and issues such as cyber-safety than about homophobic bullying. They say that bullying of any type is rare, and that if any does occur it is quickly acted upon. They feel at ease talking to adults or to peer mentors about any problems. They particularly appreciate the support of the school counsellor. Those who join the school part-way through the five years are given strong support. Some students in circumstances that might make them vulnerable spoke movingly to inspectors about the exceptionally positive impact that the school's care and support, from students as well as staff, have had on their lives.

During the inspection the behaviour of most students was excellent, both in lessons and at breaks. Students are typically very considerate, respectful and courteous to staff and to each other. They are keen to learn and lessons flow smoothly. Students often make a good contribution to learning through working cooperatively, but are not encouraged in all lessons to demonstrate independence or work with others.

Behaviour records show that over time, behaviour is good and exclusions have reduced. Though very positive about almost all aspects of the school, some parents and carers and students feel that this is not the full picture of behaviour, because disruption in lessons does occasionally occur. Inspectors noted that students have high expectations of their own and others' behaviour. Low-level disruption is comparatively rare, and usually takes place when students are not given engaging activities. Students who have behavioural difficulties are welcomed into the academy as part of its inclusive approach. Tailor-made support programmes ensure that a small group with particularly challenging behaviour make good progress in managing their emotions and improving their approach.

Leadership and management

The Principal and senior staff have established an ethos in which staff at all levels are committed to raising achievement. Their success is demonstrated by steady improvement over time, not just in areas identified in the former school's last inspection report, but also in attainment and the quality of teaching of individual staff. A programme of coaching and professional development has been effective in helping individual teachers to improve the weaker areas of practice identified through monitoring.

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Over the last two years, the Principal and governors have managed significant changes, including the transition to academy status and a building programme, while maintaining strengths and addressing weaker areas. Leaders and managers use a very responsive tracking system, which enables them not only to identify six-weekly changes in the progress of individuals, and so intervene with support, but also to identify long- and medium-term trends and plan and carry through further school improvement. Close tracking of individuals and groups means that swift management action is taken to ensure very effective promotion of equality. A good example is the successful strategy developed to improve the progress of students who are identified as needing support at school action plus.

Governance is strong. Governors challenge and support leaders well, and are in turn thoroughly aware of the academy's strengths and weaknesses. They ensure that statutory requirements are met, for example those for safeguarding students and conforming to equalities legislation.

The curriculum is outstanding because it provides rich opportunities for high quality learning and it gives excellent support to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example through opportunities such as the 'school of learning days'. Refinements to the curriculum have played a major part in the academy's strategies for raising achievement. The alternative provision for the few students who need it is very well thought through and effectively monitored. The contribution made by the academy's specialist work to students' enterprise capabilities, creativity, innovation and cross-cultural literacy through the international dimension is particularly strong.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



26 April 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Preston School Academy, Yeovil BA21 3JD

Thank you for welcoming us to your academy this week. You made a very helpful contribution through the views you gave us, your performance in lessons and the work you showed us. We found that Preston is a good school where you achieve well. Those of you who have special educational needs are now making excellent progress. We were very impressed with your understanding of and support for others, both in the academy and the wider world. In the questionnaires that so many of you returned, a small minority thought behaviour was not always good. You rightly expect high standards. While we know that everyone was making an effort in the inspection, we have checked behaviour records and talked to students and staff. We think behaviour is good.

The academy provides an excellent curriculum. You get lots of different experiences, for example through the 'learning days', and you are certainly developing your enterprise skills well. The academy is led well. We have asked the leaders to concentrate on improving two areas – aspects of teaching and the progress of the most able students in English – in order to move it closer to becoming outstanding. These are the specific strategies we have outlined.

- Give teachers and students clear examples of what the highest level of work in English looks like, and make sure marking tells students what exactly they need to do to reach that level.
- Make sure that you spend most of every lesson engaged in learning, not just listening (and sometimes 'switching off'). You can contribute to this.
- Always give you enough time to review what you have done in lessons.
- Refine the work set so it is at exactly the right level for you, and challenge you to think deeply through questioning.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours faithfully

Deborah Zachary
Lead inspector

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