

Charter Academy

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135965
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	381988
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2012
Lead inspector	Stephen Long HMI

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	367
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alex Hughes
Headteacher	Sharon Hollows
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
School address	Hyde Road Southsea Portsmouth PO5 4HL
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Age group	11–16
Inspection date(s)	2–3 May 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Stephen Long

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Farmer

Additional Inspector

Paul O'Shea

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 26 lessons taught by 25 teachers, with four of the observations conducted jointly with academy leaders. Short visits were made to additional support sessions for students needing help to catch up in areas such as reading, form-tutor sessions and an assembly. The lessons observed were selected to cover the full student age range and a cross-section of staff. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative from the academy's sponsor. Inspectors analysed 34 responses to the parent/carer questionnaire completed during the inspection and examined student and staff responses in their questionnaires. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of development plans, self-evaluations, student progress records and policies, including for safeguarding students' welfare.

Information about the school

Charter Academy opened in September 2009 to replace St Luke's CofE VA Secondary School, with most students transferring over from the school. The academy is smaller than most secondary schools but is growing, with increasing numbers of students choosing to study there after primary school. The proportions of students who speak English as an additional language, are known to be eligible for free school meals, and are disabled or have special educational needs are all above average. The Principal took up her post when the academy opened. The majority of staff also transferred from the predecessor school but there have been significant changes in staffing since then, including among senior leaders. An off-site base providing behaviour support for students opened in January 2011 and has 17 students currently attending. The academy meets the current floor standards, which set the government's minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

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 which is improving strongly. It is not yet outstanding because the leadership of teaching, while good overall, is not effective enough in all subjects to ensure the majority of lessons are of outstanding quality.
- Under the strong leadership of the Principal, senior team and governors, a very clear direction is set for improvement, based on an accurate understanding of the academy's effectiveness. Senior staff monitor teaching and the achievement of students very well. The leadership of teaching has a high priority and makes a good impact. However, the subject leaders' ability to monitor and improve teaching is variable.
- Achievement is good and improving quickly from a low base when the academy opened. Students make good and accelerating progress. Their attainment remains below national averages but they are catching up fast and aiming for challenging targets. Students say their expectations have been turned around by the academy's 'no excuses' learning culture and they want to do their best.
- Good teaching is the norm. Teachers' expectations are high. They are well focused on challenging the barriers to learning among many students in key areas such as literacy. Students work hard in lessons and usually have a clear understanding of what to do to reach or exceed their targets. In a minority of lessons this is not the case so students' progress is less brisk, and teachers do not always intervene quickly enough to get them back on track.
- Students behave well and want to learn. Their attendance has improved sharply since the academy opened, from well below average to average. The academy is a calm, orderly and safe learning environment. Students speak warmly of the change in atmosphere reflected in the 'be nice' motto on the academy walls, and the mutual respect between staff and students.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all subject leaders have outstanding skills in monitoring teaching in their areas and in leading improvements.
- Improve further the impact of teaching on learning by ensuring that in all lessons, teachers:
 - communicate key ideas and the features of high-quality work to students, so they can make decisions about how to improve their work themselves and lead their own learning
 - swiftly identify when the pace of learning has fallen, identify the reasons and remedy them.

Main report

Achievement of students

Students make good progress from low overall starting points. Examination results are below national averages but rising more quickly than nationally overall, and for vulnerable groups such as disabled students and those with special educational needs. Students' attainment in key subjects like mathematics and English, including literacy and reading, is below average but is in the forefront of improvements. Many join the academy with weak literacy skills and low expectations of what they can achieve. Good teaching helps them overcome these deficits so that in lessons most engage well in activities and enjoy their learning. Parents and carers note the good progress made by their children and welcome the change in the academy since it opened.

Achievement in lessons is particularly good when there are rich opportunities for students to discuss the ideas underpinning tasks, and to explore ideas practically. In these circumstances students not only build their understanding of subjects strongly, but also boost their skills in speaking and listening. For example, in a Year 10 English lesson students discussed widely the use of language in newspaper headlines, so as to know how to analyse other headlines for themselves. In a Year 8 food technology lesson students learned well by trying out the pizza-making techniques discussed so as to reflect on them. Students make the best progress when they understand the link between what they are asked to do and their long-term targets. This is the case in most lessons, but on a minority of occasions students are not clear about how to complete work so as to achieve well. They lose focus and are less able to learn independently, and the pace of learning slackens. The many students with special educational needs or who speak English as an additional language, and the few disabled students, achieve well in lessons due to the effective support provided. They too are aiming for challenging goals.

Quality of teaching

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Teachers are enthusiastic, work hard and have high expectations of students. They manage behaviour well, promoting good social and moral development, for example through teamwork. Most teachers organise classrooms and resources efficiently to maximise learning, and use technology such as electronic whiteboards confidently. A very effective assessment system gives them a clear picture of each student's current attainment, targets and next steps for improvement. Most teachers use this information, and their good subject knowledge, well to plan activities which challenge students. Teachers and additional adults work effectively together in lessons to support students with additional learning needs, such as those with social and emotional difficulties. Good opportunities are taken to support literacy and numeracy, with lessons regularly including key words, or links to mathematical concepts.

In the best lessons, teachers demonstrate examples of high-quality learning and test students' understanding before moving on, for example through targeted questions and/or peer assessment. Crucially, they also check progress during lessons and intervene decisively to share good learning or tackle any misunderstandings. This was evident in Year 7 and 8 physical education lessons where teachers efficiently re-grouped students identified as needing a better understanding of what they were trying to achieve in basketball or swimming. Weaknesses in these aspects characterise the minority of less effective lessons, and this explains why teaching overall makes a good but not outstanding impact on learning.

Teachers' feedback to students about their progress via marking is good. Teachers use the straightforward system well to ensure students know their long-term goals, understand what they have done well and know their 'even better ifs'. Good steps are taken, especially with less-able students, to ensure they understand written feedback. Staff are active in providing additional support where students have specific learning difficulties. This typifies the academy culture of overcoming barriers to learning. For example, there is a well-organised system of additional tuition for reading and other subjects. Teachers set homework regularly and it contributes well to students' independent learning skills.

Behaviour and safety of students

Students behave well in lessons and around the site. They arrive punctually in the morning and to lessons, where they are usually considerate toward each other, for example cooperating well in small-group tasks. Lessons are seldom disrupted by poor behaviour and students contribute to learning, for example by helping to get equipment out or pack it away. Staff consistently convey high expectations for appropriate behaviour. They model these well, including by welcoming students at the gate in the morning and into classrooms. This is appreciated by students. Relationships among students and with staff are positive, so the academy offers a pleasant learning environment. Parents and carers support this view and are pleased with behaviour and safety. There is little bullying, and students understand well the dangers of different forms of bullying. They say they feel safe, and that any bullying that does occur is tackled robustly by staff, who do not tolerate unacceptable behaviour such as racism.

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Students are well supported in how to stay safe, and trust staff if they need to turn to them for help. Staff show great determination, and enjoy good success in supporting students who find difficulty behaving well. Effective work with external agencies such as social services strengthens support. Additional provision, including the off-site base and internal support areas, is well organised to modify students' behaviour and engage them in learning. As a result, disruptions to learning and exclusions have reduced sharply in the last two years. Academy staff make innovative adjustments to the curriculum to boost students' motivation. For example, they organise horse-riding lessons for some students to build their self-esteem. Similarly, well-focused work on attendance has led to this rising consistently over time from a low base. It is now average, and staff show good capacity to bring about further improvement. They monitor students' attendance closely, identifying individuals or groups causing concern and providing effective support, including for families.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders set challenging targets for the academy which inform all levels of its work and sustain a brisk pace for developments. Their high aspirations and vision are shared by staff. Good communication with parents and carers ensures they are well informed about their children's progress, and developments at the academy such as in the curriculum. Senior staff make very effective use of assessment information to hold teachers accountable for their impact on achievement, and to check outcomes for different groups of students so as to promote equality and tackle discrimination. The governors, together with the sponsor representatives, have an outstanding grasp of the academy's performance and provide excellent support and challenge. They give their statutory duties, including for safeguarding students, a high priority and regularly review relevant procedures. Teaching is improving well because of the strong focus on staff development. Staff respond well to the support provided for them. Academy self-evaluation is accurate, particularly at senior leadership level, giving a clear picture of the next steps required. Subject leadership is developing well but is variable, with several new or inexperienced staff in post. They are supported well by senior colleagues but their ability to monitor teaching via lesson observation or data analysis is inconsistent, as is their awareness of how to improve it.

The curriculum is adapted well to meet students' needs. Significant adjustment of programmes for older students, such as extra tuition in English and mathematics, has enabled significant gaps in their learning to be addressed. A strong focus on basic literacy and numeracy, coupled with good teaching, ensures younger students make good progress from the start and do not require such adjustments. Students receive a good balance of academic and vocational subjects, including in areas such as modern foreign languages. Leaders have well-focused plans for further development. Disabled students and those with the most significant special educational needs are supported well through a balance of specialist lessons and integrated lessons with other students. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is mapped carefully into the curriculum. Good links are

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made with the local community, for example through performing arts events and sharing boxing facilities in the gym.

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.

7 May 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Charter Academy, Southsea PO5 4HL

Thank you for your help during our recent inspection and for telling us your views, including through the questionnaires some of you completed. Charter Academy is a good school that provides you with a good quality of education. You told us how much it has improved since it opened.

- You make good progress in lessons and over time and are making up for the fact that some of you have not achieved enough in the past.
- You told us, and we could see for ourselves, that teachers are working hard to help you learn as much as you can in lessons and in their marking of your work.
- Most lessons make you think hard about how to improve your work to hit your targets, and we could see that you really found the discussion of ideas and of how to achieve high-quality work helpful. However, in a few lessons you are not clear enough about how to move your work forward and teachers do not always notice this so as to give you extra help.
- You behave well in lessons and around the academy and are looked after well by staff. They do a good job in helping you to behave well, attend regularly and stay safe. Keep going with the work to improve attendance further.
- The Principal and the other staff are determined to improve things even more. They are making a good impact on areas like teaching, for example by watching each other teach and providing feedback. However, this work is not always as useful as it could be.

I have asked the Principal and her colleagues to include the following in their development plans.

- Ensure that all lessons are equally effective in helping you understand how to move your own learning forward, and that teachers check your progress carefully so they can give you extra help when it is needed.
- Make sure that all the staff involved in improving teaching are equally effective at doing this.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Long
Her Majesty's Inspector

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