

St Aldhelm's Academy

Herbert Avenue, Poole, Dorset, BH12 4HS

Inspection dates 9–10 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Although results rose considerably in 2012, not enough students achieve five or more A* to C GCSE grades.
- Teaching is not yet consistent enough across the academy to make sure that all students make good progress all the time.
- All students are now making better progress but it is not as fast for some, including those who are eligible for extra government funding.
- The academy has significantly improved its teaching of reading and writing but there is more to be done for those students who struggle with literacy.
- Lessons are not disturbed by poor behaviour but when students are not supervised by staff, some of them do not manage their own behaviour well.
- Even though attendance has significantly improved and the academy staff work very hard to ensure students attend regularly, it is still too low.
- The sixth form requires improvement as it has only recently set out its purpose and the particular focus it will take.

The school has the following strengths

- It is an improving academy. More students are making good progress.
- Behaviour is much better. Students respect staff and do as they are asked. In classrooms, they focus on their work.
- Leadership and management are good.
- The Principal is determined to raise standards. She is passionate that every student succeeds and that St Aldhelm's will become an excellent academy for the whole community.
- Teaching has improved considerably. Senior leaders have taken strong action to tackle inadequate teaching. High-quality training is in place to make sure teaching keeps improving.
- Governors support and challenge the academy very well. They have an exciting long-term vision, which includes new buildings, and they are firm in their determination to improve standards and teaching quickly.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 21 lessons. All were observed with senior leaders from the academy.
- Discussions were held with three groups of students, governors, academy staff, a consultant who is currently supporting the academy and an official from the Department for Education, who monitors its progress.
- During the inspection, inspectors took account of seven responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of the results of a questionnaire for academy staff.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and read a number of documents, including the academy's improvement plans, data on students' current progress, minutes of the governing body meetings, feedback from members of the community, reports from other agencies and records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Stephen McShane, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Robert Lovett

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Jones

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Aldhelm's Academy opened in September 2010. It is housed in part of the accommodation of the school it replaced. There are extensive building works on the site and the academy will move into new accommodation in 2013.
- The academy's sponsors are the Church of England, Salisbury Diocese and Bournemouth University. It has subject specialisms in mathematics and sports.
- The academy is smaller than most secondary schools.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for students entitled to free school meals or in care and those with a parent serving in the armed forces) is well below that found nationally. Most students are of White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students who are supported at school action or school action plus as they have a disability or special educational needs is higher than the national average. The proportion of students who have statements of special educational needs is also above average.
- The academy does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring teachers push students to do their very best during every lesson
 - using the available information on students to plan work that is at the right level and always challenging for individuals and groups of students
 - providing regular opportunities for students to learn independently and be responsible for their own learning
 - ensuring written feedback is acted upon by students so they can improve their learning further.
- Improve students' literacy skills by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use agreed approaches to improve speaking, reading and writing in every lesson and in all subjects
 - identifying groups and individuals who need specific help and ensuring that this help is put in place quickly
 - rigorously monitoring the additional support given to these students to ensure that it is speeding up progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- GCSE results rose considerably in 2012 from a very low base. Many more students left the academy with GCSEs and other work-related qualifications. The academy gave students in their final year a great deal of extra support and help. This meant that they made up some of the ground lost due to previous poor teaching. They achieved more than they had in the past. However, when the proportion of GCSE higher grade passes achieved by students is compared with that of other schools nationally, it is too low.
- The students who are currently in Year 11 are making much better progress and the academy predicts that there will be another big increase in the number of students who get good GCSEs in 2013. This would mean that the academy will achieve the government's floor standards for the first time.
- The few students who attended the sixth form last year completed their courses successfully and those who studied travel and tourism are now studying tourism at university. The sixth form is at an early stage of development and its future focus and direction have only recently been agreed.
- Students have had inadequate teaching in the past. This means that they made slow progress and were not doing well. Now, progress has improved. In many cases, students are catching up quickly and making faster progress than is usual.
- Standards are improving for all students in English and mathematics throughout the academy. More students are well prepared for further education or the world of work. However, students who are eligible for the pupil premium have not made as much progress as some others in the academy.
- Many students do not find reading and writing interesting or easy. There has been a lot of work to improve the way these subjects are taught and it is beginning to make a difference. All students are reading more, their writing is better and they are developing wider vocabulary so that they can do well in other subjects. However, progress is not as fast for those students who have more difficulties or have special educational needs.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching has improved a great deal from when the academy first opened. There is much more good teaching and much less that is inadequate. This means that students are learning more, particularly in key subjects such as mathematics and English, as well as sports.
- However, there is still some inconsistency in the teaching, including that in the sixth form. The best lessons are interesting, fun, challenging, very clear and precise. This means that students are very clear about what they have to learn. They develop new skills and knowledge well. Examples were seen in mathematics lessons. Students were learning about probability. The teachers carefully built up the difficulty of the problems the students had to solve. Precise questioning from the teacher checked whether they understood. Students were absorbed throughout and had to think deeply. By the end of the session, they could tackle complex problems confidently.
- In weaker lessons, the activities are designed for the whole class. These lessons lack challenge for the individuals or groups of students who could learn more quickly. This means that students complete the tasks that the teacher sets but they are not gaining new knowledge or getting to grips with anything they find difficult. There are not enough opportunities for students to be responsible for their own learning and work by themselves.
- The teachers now have a great deal of information about each student from tests and checking progress. They know the level that each student is working at and have set targets for the future. Students know these targets and are beginning to aim to achieve higher grades. However, teachers are not always using the targets to plan their teaching. This means the work

is sometimes too hard and sometimes too easy.

- Teachers mark students work regularly. In the best examples seen by inspectors, marking makes clear to students what they did well and what needs to get better. However, students do not always act on this advice so it is not making enough difference.
- The best teaching in the academy includes different ways of helping students to check their own work or to let the teacher know quickly that they found the work difficult. Inspectors saw students marking their own or each other's work. This helps them understand any mistakes they have made or how to improve next time. In a few lessons students used different coloured cards to signal to the teacher that they were having difficulties or, at the end of the lesson, put their work in different coloured boxes to tell the teacher quickly if they found it easy or too hard. These techniques are helping to improve students' learning. They clearly work and students like them but they are not yet used in all lessons.
- The academy has made it a priority to improve students' speaking, reading and writing. Now, in the best lessons, teachers ask careful questions so that students give more precise answers, using more technical language. There are regular times to read and write and teachers expect neat handwriting and good presentation in books. However, there is not enough specific support for those students who find it more difficult to read, to make sure they are making enough progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils require improvement

- Everyone in the academy is very clear that there has been a great improvement in behaviour since the academy opened. Generally, it is now a calm and orderly environment where students are able to learn. This is excellent improvement, particularly in the current, very cramped buildings. Punctuality to the academy and to lessons has also improved.
- Relationships between staff and students are good. Staff are supportive and committed to the students. They show warmth and good humour. In classrooms, students respond well to this and want to please. This means lessons are not disrupted and work is completed.
- There has been a big decrease in exclusions. The Principal and vice principals no longer have to spend time patrolling corridors to deal with bad behaviour that spills out from classrooms. Behaviour is managed in class by teachers and support staff. Students stay in class and learn.
- Students now go on more trips and outings. Their behaviour when outside is a credit to the academy. People in the local community, including the police, have given positive feedback about the improvements they have witnessed.
- The improvement in behaviour has come about because of the high expectations of the academy and consistency from staff. This means that most students do as they are told when asked to listen in class or when they are spoken to about their uniform or mobile phones.
- Behaviour is at its best in the classroom or in the corridors when there is consistent and close supervision from staff. The behaviour as students entered the hall for assembly was excellent.
- The behaviour of a few students gets worse either when they are not closely supervised or when staff do not challenge bad behaviour quickly and firmly in line with academy rules. On these occasions, some students start to use bad language and can become physical with each other.
- Students say that any bullying is dealt with well. However, there are instances of homophobic bullying in the academy. The majority of staff have clear expectations and deal with this firmly as a bullying issue. However, the word 'gay' is commonly used by many students to mean 'rubbish'. It has become acceptable for many to say this is 'banter'. During the inspection there were instances when students mocked others whom they said were 'homosexual'.
- Behaviour is best from those students who are clearly proud of their academy. They recognise that it is improving all the time and want to be part of that improvement. Students are less inclined to turn off from education and become badly behaved because the academy now offers courses that they enjoy. There remain a few who are still inclined to challenge authority and

attempt to intimidate others, which can make a few students feel unsafe.

- Attendance has improved greatly and is still improving. The academy has a very robust response to non-attendance. Staff, including the inclusion team, work closely with students and their families. The academy offers rewards and a breakfast club. It has been successful in encouraging more students to attend more regularly, in particular those who are eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs or who are disabled. However, when attendance is compared to that in other secondary schools, it is still too low.

The leadership and management are good

- The academy is well led by a determined Principal who is absolutely clear that her priority is the success of the students of St Aldhelm's. She expects the very best from staff and students and challenges those who do not live up to these expectations. Even though there are many pressures and competing demands, she is dogged and resolute that teaching will improve and standards will rise. Her firm and clear leadership has brought about real improvements in the progress of students. She has an honest and straightforward approach that means that staff and students trust her.
- The senior managers have a very good grasp of what needs to be done to make things better. They have very clear plans in place. Staff morale is good. Even though there have been many changes in staff and some are quite new, teamwork is developing fast so more and more staff are involved in the drive for improvement.
- The Principal and vice principals have taken some tough decisions to rid the academy of inadequate teaching. When they watch teaching, they judge the quality well and are helping teachers to get better. They have made good appointments to the teaching staff. There is a great deal of high-quality training in place so that all staff can improve. There is also a stringent process which gives teachers targets to reach and these are regularly checked.
- Senior managers have worked hard to ensure that the academy runs efficiently. Finance systems are clear and priorities for spending are closely linked to improving students' progress. In 2011/12 the pupil premium provided guidance from mentors and additional support for the older students who were most at risk of not doing as well as they should. As a result, there was a noticeable rise in results and attendance for this group.
- The academy is very aware of those students who may be at risk of underachievement and through its focus on working with individuals has strengthened its support to them. Through its assemblies, subjects and the good examples provided by staff, it promotes good relationships and challenges discrimination. However, it recognises that there is still more work to do.
- Information on students' progress is becoming much more detailed. The systems to check that everyone is doing the best they can are getting more and more sophisticated.
- Throughout the inspection there were many examples where students supported each other and there is clear evidence of good relationships and a close-knit academy community that is growing stronger. Well-led assemblies and an effective chaplaincy support students well in developing their moral and spiritual thinking. A wider range of additional opportunities, which is growing all the time, helps students broaden their knowledge of sports, arts, their local community and other cultures. Sixth form students are encouraged to take on extra responsibilities across the academy.
- The academy works very well with a number of outside experts to support staff or check on their improvement. In particular, this has helped improve the teaching of literacy. As the academy gets better, it needs less and less outside help. However, it goes on working very well with experts and other schools to work on those areas that are still priorities.
- The academy has organised students into four small schools. The small schools for older students offer subjects so students can choose to take an academic route or a work-related route (including land-based studies or hair and beauty) or a mixture of academic and work-related subjects. Students told inspectors that the small school for the youngest students helped

them get used to secondary school and made their transfer from middle school easy.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors are very well informed about the academy. They have detailed and up-to-date knowledge of students' progress and the quality of teaching.
 - They provide strong challenge and support, holding the Principal and senior managers to account very effectively.
 - Governors have a very clear vision for the future and are very clear about short-term and long-term priorities.
 - Governors have a strong record of dealing with difficult issues, including personnel and financial decisions.
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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	136206
Local authority	Poole
Inspection number	399799

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	12–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	421
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Fernandez
Principal	Cheryl Heron
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01202 732500
Fax number	01202 739009
Email address	office@staldhelmsacademy.org

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