

Hall Cross Academy

St Michael's Road, Doncaster, South Yorkshire, DN4 5LU

Inspection dates 12–13 December 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		Good 2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Not enough teaching ensures that students make fast progress or learn well in all lessons.
- The academy's expectations and policies are not carried out consistently.
- As a result, students' achievement is too variable across subjects and classes.
- Teachers do not use information about where individual students are at in their learning to meet their different needs well enough.
- The feedback students receive on their work does not always provide them with enough guidance on how to improve it.
- Not all teachers ensure students are actively enough involved in their learning, and they do not always check students' understanding thoroughly during lessons.
- The sixth form requires improvement. The weaknesses evident in the main school are also features of the sixth form.
- Not all leaders use the full range of evidence available when checking the effectiveness of the areas for which they are responsible. Some are not ensuring that agreed expectations and policies are being carried out consistently by their teams.

The school has the following strengths

- Some teaching is good and outstanding and results in students learning well and making good progress.
- Students' achievement is good in some subjects, including English.
- Students' behaviour is good and there are positive relationships within the academy.
- Students feel safe in the academy and are well cared for.
- The headteacher leads the academy with drive and determination. Along with some other leaders at both senior and middle level and the governing body, she understands what needs to be improved. Some concerted action is being taken to bring this about.
- As a result, although the academy is not yet good overall, it is improving.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 49 lessons, looked at students’ work and observed a range of other aspects of the academy’s work.
- They had meetings with groups of students, the headteacher and other leaders and the Chair of the Governing Body. They also had a conversation with an external consultant who is working with the academy and one of the alternative providers used by the academy.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 47 parents who made their views known on-line at Parent View.
- Documents were scrutinised, including information relating to students’ progress and attendance, staff performance management, minutes of governing body meetings and monitoring and evaluation records.

Inspection team

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Additional Inspector

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Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is much larger than other secondary schools. The sixth form is also very large. The academy has two sites, with students in Years 7 to 9 on one and those in Years 10 to 13 on the other.
- The large majority of students are of White British heritage, and most speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs who are supported at the level known as school action is below average.
- The proportion supported at the level known as school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above average. Pupil premium funding supports those who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those in the care of a local authority and those whose families are in the military forces.
- The proportion of students joining the academy at other than the usual times is above average.
- The alternative providers used by the academy are Engage Training, YMCA, Doncaster College, Glad Training, Oracle training, Enhancement Training, Heatherwood School and Balby Youth Centre.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- Hall Cross Academy converted to become an academy in February 2012. When its predecessor school, Hall Cross School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be satisfactory overall.
- Hall Cross is a member of a Consortium of Community Trust academies, which is an informal partnership with three other academies designed to promote collaboration and improvement across the participating schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching in order to accelerate students' progress and ensure their achievement is consistently good or better across subjects and in all key stages by ensuring that:
 - when planning and teaching lessons, all teachers use information about where individual students are at in their learning to match work closely to their different needs
 - when marking students' work, all teachers give them clear feedback on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work and reach their targets
 - all teachers use approaches and tasks in lessons that ensure students are actively involved in their learning
 - teachers use a wider range of strategies for checking students' understanding during lessons, including more effective questioning, so that any misunderstandings are quickly identified and corrected.
- Ensure that all leaders, especially those at middle level, are consistently effective in improving the areas they are responsible for by making sure that:
 - all leaders draw on the full range of evidence available when checking the effectiveness of the areas for which they are responsible, so that they have an accurate understanding of what needs to be improved
 - all leaders take clear actions to tackle the priorities for improvement and to promote consistency within their teams
 - all leaders check regularly and thoroughly on the effect that the actions that they and their team are putting in place are having on improving outcomes for students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- When students who left Year 11 in 2012 joined the school, their attainment was significantly above the national average. It was also significantly above the latest national figures overall when they finished Year 11. This was the case for the proportion gaining five or more examination results at grades C or above including English and mathematics. It was also the case when student's results in their best eight examinations are taken into account. However, in many courses, attainment was in line with, rather than above, national levels.
- Results were significantly above the national figures in a range of subjects, including in English language, mathematics, some science courses, geography, art and design and physical education.
- These results represented good progress in some of the courses, including English language. However, in others, including mathematics and science, the results did not represent good progress. The results were in line with what would be expected given students' starting points, but were not better than that.
- So, while students do well in some subjects, students' achievement requires improvement in order to become good overall.
- There is considerable variability across subjects. Results in 2012 were broadly in line with the latest national figures in a majority of courses – some of which were studied by only one or two classes of students. In some cases students' starting points were lower and outcomes that are in line with national figures represent reasonable progress. A range of reasons play a part in the achievement on some courses not being good. The early entry of a particular group of students for the mathematics examination meant that some did not get the highest grades they were capable of. In other cases, achievement that was not good reflected the quality of teaching.
- The variability in outcomes across subjects is also seen in the sixth form. When students leave Year 13, their attainment overall is average. Their rate of progress across different courses is not uniform. While good in some, in many courses it requires improvement in order to become good.
- The attainment of virtually all different groups of students is higher than similar groups nationally. This includes pupils who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, whose achievement is good. While their standards in examinations are not as high as for other students in the academy, the difference between the two groups is smaller than it is nationally.
- Some other groups also achieve well, including students with low prior attainment, the small minority who speak English as an additional language and some of those with special educational needs. However, for the majority of students, including White British students and some with special educational needs, achievement requires improvement.
- Students who study for some of their time with alternative providers make appropriate progress.
- Steps are being taken to improve students' achievement. For example, students' learning in Years 7 and 8 is improving due to the approach being taken to develop their skills through the 'H-baccalaureate' that has been introduced. Other changes include a review of the use of early entry to examinations. A range of training targeted at different aspects of teaching is underway. Nevertheless, there are still inconsistencies within and across subjects.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because it is too variable within and across subjects. However, some teaching is good and outstanding and ensures that students learn well.
- In these more effective lessons, students work in groups on well planned activities, which deepen their understanding and which require all of them to be actively involved. For example, the tasks given to a group of Year 8 students in an 'H-baccalaureate' lesson built well on each other, developing students' insights in a systematic manner as they prepared presentations on India for younger students. The teacher provided a clear structure and acted as a very effective

facilitator, posing questions to extend and develop students' thinking in a way that was suited to their different needs, without doing the work for them or simply giving them the answers. Students were fully interested and engaged in both lessons and learnt extremely well.

- In contrast, in some lessons, teachers' planning and teaching is less effective and does not take account of students' different levels of knowledge or rates of progress. As a result, too many teachers adopt the 'one size fits all' approach which does not meet individual students' needs equally well. Tasks do not always have the right level of challenge for all. Some are too difficult, and others are low level and do not extend students' knowledge or understanding effectively.
- On occasions, some teachers talk for too long and students are expected to sit and listen passively for lengthy periods. Questions are sometimes directed at a few individuals and are phrased in a way that does not encourage discussion, so the understanding of all is not checked and misunderstandings are not always identified and rectified quickly enough.
- The marking of students' work is inconsistent. Some is regular, thorough and gives a clear indication of what students have to do to improve. Other marking is irregular, cursory and does not provide helpful guidance.
- Teaching assistants are deployed well in some lessons and they give valuable support to students to help them learn well, especially those with lower prior attainment or with special educational needs. The contributions of others are sometimes less effective.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour around the academy is good. The large majority of students are polite, friendly and get on well with each other. They do as they are asked and try hard to meet the academy's expectations of their conduct. They say they enjoy school.
- Students' behaviour in lessons is also good overall. Again, the large majority follow instructions and they are willing and often keen to learn.
- When teachers give careful thought as to how to interest students, involve them, meet their different needs and give them feedback on how to improve their work, students respond with high levels of application, independence and enjoyment.
- When teachers either put less effort into their planning of lessons so the above features are not present, or carry them out less effectively, students' attitudes towards their learning are less positive. Most still behave well, but they are not as engaged or involved. Occasionally this turns into low level inattentiveness.
- Students say that bullying does occur but is rare and is quickly dealt with. They value having the 'bullying button' on their website via which they can report incidents of bullying should any occur.
- Students have a clear understanding of how to keep safe, including when using the internet.
- Ensuring students are well cared for and supported is given a high priority. As a result, students feel safe within the academy. The academy promotes positive relationships and takes steps to ensure equality of opportunity for students to find success.
- Students also feel they get good guidance at key points of transition. Sixth form students, for example, are positive about the help they receive on entering Year 12 and as a result feel they chose the right courses. The proportion of Year 12 students staying on to Year 13 is high.
- The academy has worked successfully to improve attendance and to reduce exclusions. Attendance is broadly in line with the national average.
- Staff at the academy liaise closely with alternative providers to ensure that students are safe and that they behave well and attend regularly.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- A strong steer is being given to staff in the drive to improve the academy. The effectiveness of different aspects of the academy, including the quality of teaching, is checked regularly by senior

leaders. Appropriate action is taken to tackle weaknesses identified, and this includes robust measures where judged to be necessary.

- Training and targets for the work that staff do are focused on key priorities for development. Some actions to improve teaching are taken to help all teachers improve similar aspects of their teaching, while others are directed at smaller groups and focus on more specific issues.
- As a result, the effectiveness of the academy is improving. For example, students' attainment and attendance are both rising.
- However, not all subjects and areas of the academy's work are improving at equal rates. In some subjects, leaders are ensuring better outcomes for students through promoting greater consistency and quality of practice by their teams. In other subjects, the work of leaders is less effective. They are not all drawing on the full range of the evidence available when checking whether agreed expectations and policies are being carried out and whether the quality of practice is ensuring consistently effective experiences and achievement for students.
- The range of courses meets students' needs increasingly well. Their organisation is kept under review and is adapted when it is felt that any elements could meet their needs more strongly. For example, the practice of entering students for examinations before the end of Year 11 is now used more judiciously.
- The introduction of the 'H-baccalaureate' for students in Years 7 and 8 is a positive development. The explicit focus on developing their literacy skills and the skills they need to have to be effective in their learning is escalating their progress and enhancing their enjoyment.
- The academy has effective partnerships with training providers to cater for a group of students whose needs are better served through the alternative arrangements that they are able to provide.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effectively promoted in a variety of ways, such as the 'H- baccalaureate' through which different cultures and religions are studied, and through the philosophy and ethics curriculum. However, opportunities to develop these aspects are missed in some lessons in other subjects.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is provided with detailed information about developments within the academy and so has a clear awareness of its strengths and areas that require improvement. They ask searching questions of it to hold it to account. They understand the relevant arrangements to link pay with the quality of work that staff do. The governing body is ensuring that pupil premium funding is being allocated appropriately and to positive effect.

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	137843
Local authority	Not applicable
Inspection number	406685

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2130
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	520
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phillip Marshall
Headteacher	Pippa Dodgshon
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01302 320626
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	pdn@hallcrossacademy.co.uk

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