

Northampton Academy

Wellingborough Road, Northampton, NN3 8NH

Inspection dates 30–31 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well. GCSE results are improving considerably year on year so that they are now average overall.
- Teaching is typically good and sometimes outstanding. Students are keen to learn.
- Behaviour is good and students feel safe at the academy. Students recognise the positive changes since the last inspection. They say that this has helped them to improve their behaviour and achievement.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress because of good or better teaching.
- The Principal's highly effective leadership is a key reason for the improvements brought about in students' achievement in recent years.
- Leadership across the academy is ambitious. Governors and staff understand the academy's motto, 'Bringing out the best in everyone', and work hard to put this vision into practice. Self-evaluation is accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses.
- Lessons are observed regularly by leaders. They develop teaching well and provide good training for teachers at all levels of experience to continue improving their skills.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not yet enough outstanding teaching to raise achievement higher. Not enough opportunities are provided for independent learning. Teachers' questioning is not used consistently well.
- Although attendance is improving, there are still some students whose attendance is too low.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 45 lessons or part lessons across all year groups, observing 44 teachers and some other adults. Six lessons were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with staff, students, members of the local governing board, including the Chair and the Director of the United Learning academy sponsor.
- Inspectors looked at the academy’s work, students’ achievement information, development planning and the academy’s self-evaluation. The academy’s central record of checks on staff was also scrutinised.
- Inspectors considered the 24 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also took account of the views of staff, including those expressed in 131 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Dilip Kadodwala, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional Inspector
William Cassell	Additional Inspector
Derek Wiles	Additional Inspector
Stephen Munday	Additional Inspector
Patrick Walsh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is larger than most secondary schools.
- Most students come from White British backgrounds. Other students come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds; the largest groups are of African, Caribbean, Indian and Bangladeshi backgrounds. Very few students are at an early stage of learning English.
- There is a high proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for whom the academy receives additional income (the pupil premium).
- The proportion of students supported through school action is high, and the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- A very small number of students in Years 10 and 11 are educated off-site for one or two days a week at Northampton College.
- The academy meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by making sure that all teachers:
 - provide harder work, particularly for the more-able students
 - give more opportunities for students to work independently and to take responsibility for their own learning
 - use questioning consistently well to extend students' learning.
- Improve the attendance of those students who are finding it difficult to attend regularly.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the academy with standards that are low. The proportion of students who achieve five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics is broadly average and rising markedly. However, the proportion of students gaining the highest grades is below average.
- Students are prepared well for the next stage of their education or training because almost all leave Year 11 with a range of qualifications. In 2012, 98% of students gained five or more A* to G grades, which is above the national figure.
- Past underachievement, for example in science, is being eliminated quickly. Students are doing much better now because of improved leadership and teaching.
- Almost all students are entered early for mathematics GCSE examination. Care is taken to make sure that students do not drop subjects. They take the examination again in the summer and a good proportion of students improve by gaining higher grades.
- In the sixth form, students' progress is good. Where, historically, A-level results were lower than they should have been, performance is improving.
- Students read well. They take advantage of a lively library which promotes an enjoyment of reading for boys and girls through books which suit their particular interests.
- Students with weaker skills in reading are supported effectively, using the pupil premium funding, so that they gain quickly the skills they need. Different subjects make it their business to promote literacy skills as well. The result is that students' progress in English by the end of Year 11 compares favourably with national figures.
- Students have good mathematical skills which they apply in several subjects. For example, in a Year 8 information and communication technology lesson, students were able to apply their understanding of formulae in creating spreadsheets.
- The academy monitors the progress of individuals very carefully. Gaps in learning are spotted early and suitable action is taken promptly to make sure that students do not fall behind.
- Effective use is made of additional funding received through the pupil premium, particularly for those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. Within the academy, gaps in average point scores (a measure used to compare overall GCSE attainment), for this group of students and all other students, are closing rapidly.
- The off-site provision for a very small number of students is carefully chosen. Their progress is checked regularly and, as with other students, they are achieving well.
- Teachers and other adults provide good support to disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Support is tailored so that it is at the right level, including some provided through small 'nurture' groups, where students benefit from help which improves their reading and writing skills. By the end of Year 11, this group of students' progress is in line with that of their classmates.

- Students from the range of minority ethnic groups do well. Their 2012 GCSE results and their progress are at least as good as those of others and, for some, higher than the national figures. For example, Black African students' attainment at GCSE was better than that of similar students nationally.
- Learning in lessons is good. Students work together without fuss and enjoy commenting on how well each is doing when checking each other's work. Occasionally, learning slows when students are not encouraged to work without teachers helping.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good. Some lessons are outstanding. New teachers have been appointed, including those who are newly qualified. By using a good range of support and training, the amount of good teaching is evident across all subjects. Teaching in English and mathematics is consistently good, and occasionally outstanding.
- Typically good teaching is when students are fully involved in their learning. They understand what they have to do and willingly check what progress they are making during the lesson. This helps to move their learning on at a brisk pace. Individual students who find learning difficult are supported by tasks pitched at the right level.
- Teaching is also good when teachers ask questions that make students think. For example, this was seen in a Year 10 mathematics lesson, where students were asked to explain their working out of problems when calculating the circumference of circles. Similarly, in a Year 10 art lesson, the teacher's timely prompts, including asking 'how will you solve that problem?' pushed students to think deeper.
- Students develop good quality reading and writing skills. They are encouraged to speak in lessons and discuss their ideas with others. They read aloud, developing their confidence. The teaching of numeracy and computer skills is established well across different subjects.
- Students make good progress in lessons when they are required to work independently and to make choices about how they learn. A Year 12 history lesson illustrates this well. Using resources and questions skilfully chosen by the teacher, students were able to work out a range of interpretations about the Gestapo during the Second World War.
- Likewise, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson on algebra substitution, the teacher provided tasks of varying difficulty, with students making their own choices. They relished the challenges, acted responsibly and all students made good progress in the lesson.
- Teachers provide regular homework that supports learning in lessons well. The academy is seeking to extend this further by providing access to homework for students and parents and carers by using the academy website and apps for handheld devices.
- Teaching assistants work closely with teachers to provide support for students who have specific needs or difficulties. This helps them to work by themselves, as well as with others when necessary.
- Teachers' marking is good. Students get detailed information about how to improve their work and students follow the advice given. In some lessons, inspectors saw teachers using a 'no hands up' approach, with teachers calling out numbers linked to names randomly. This worked well because students had to listen attentively at all times.

- Inspectors saw examples in lessons that encouraged students to consider cultural, moral and spiritual aspects of human life. For instance, in a Year 11 English lesson on the text *Of Mice and Men*, imaginative teaching allowed students to explore their own feelings and attitudes when discussing racial prejudice.
- There are excellent examples of students' artwork displayed around the academy which lead students to reflect, appreciate a wide range of cultures and be inspired.
- Students do not learn as well as they could when teachers do not use questioning consistently well, engage students in their own learning and when there are insufficient opportunities for students to learn independently. This slows the pace of learning, especially for the more-able students who do not reach their potential.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students are keen to learn. They treat each other with respect and value the cultural and social diversity found in the academy.
- Students' behaviour is good. Although only a small number of parents and carers responded on Parent View, those who did respond mostly agree that the academy manages behaviour well. The academy's much larger survey of parents last term also shows that this is the case.
- Students, including those in the sixth form, are happy to take on responsibilities, such as hearing younger students read. Those students recently elected to the academy student council are keen to play an active part, for instance in helping to shape a policy for the use of mobile phones.
- Students know what to do to stay safe. They know right from wrong and are confident to share any worries they may have with their teachers. Students develop good social skills. These were very obvious in the lessons seen by inspectors. Students listen to each other's views and participate in group activities willingly.
- Students' understanding about bullying, including homophobic and racial bullying, is promoted well through lessons and assemblies. Instances of bullying are carefully recorded. Students say that they feel confident to report them because they will be dealt with quickly and fairly.
- The behaviour and safety of the very few students who are educated off-site is checked regularly.
- The academy is successful in creating a climate of trust where students are valued whatever their backgrounds or beliefs. Students are looked after well. The academy provides considerable support for families experiencing difficulties.
- There is an effective counselling service to provide personal support for individual students. Staff also provide good academic guidance for students, including in the sixth form.
- Exclusion rates have fallen significantly and attendance has improved steadily over the last three years. However, in spite of the robust approach taken by the academy, the attendance of some students is low.

The leadership and management are good

- The key to the academy's success lies in the Principal's relentless push to make sure that the academy serves the needs of its students as well as it possibly can. With the good support of other leaders, staff and governors, she has galvanised staff to raise standards and sustain a strong trend of improvement in students' achievement.
- Leaders accurately identify strengths and weaknesses, and planning for development makes sure that staff have a shared sense of purpose and are clear about how to make further improvements. The academy's good capacity for continuing to improve is shown in what a student told an inspector: 'The school is improving and it is not going to stop!'
- Care is taken to make sure that everyone has the chance to succeed. This is resulting in higher achievement for students. Leaders are now working hard to narrow the attainment gap between White British students and other students and to make sure that the more-able students reach their potential. There are some early signs of success on both these fronts.
- While leaders and managers have improved the quality of teaching to good, not enough of it is outstanding. Actions taken to improve students' attendance have not yet brought about the level of change needed to make sure that many more attend every day.
- Senior leaders have secured good leadership at faculty and subject levels. Staff are accountable to senior leaders and benefit from regular meetings to check how well students are progressing and to share good practice.
- The setting of targets for teachers to improve their work is rigorous. It is linked to information about how well students are doing. Salary scales are directly linked to achievement of these targets. Training is tailored to individual needs and makes sure that students' achievement improves as a result.
- Support available within the United Learning organisation, for example links with other academy schools, is used well to improve teaching. The English department has benefited particularly from this and improvements here are now being modelled for science.
- Leaders check on the quality of teaching by observing lessons and looking through students' work. They listen to students' views about teaching and take account of responses made by parents when they attend meetings to discuss their children's progress and through surveys.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. Improved advice and guidance is ensuring that the majority of students complete their courses and progress well.
- The academy uses the additional pupil premium funding to good effect. For example, qualified teachers have been appointed to specifically teach the weakest readers and these students' progress has been speeded up. When comparing average point scores for GCSEs in 2012, academy students eligible for free school meals attained higher on this measure than similar students nationally.
- There is good engagement with parents; an improvement since the last inspection. The Principal hosts drop-in sessions every week. This and other methods of seeking parental views have resulted in, for example, changing the content of a new termly academy newsletter. At their request, a small group of Somali parents run a homework club which is open for all students. Inspectors' discussions with students confirm that this is a valuable opportunity.

- The range of subjects and courses is matched closely to students' needs. Students are offered a choice of courses of interest to them, including in the sixth form. There are many enrichment opportunities, such as trips and visits, which add to the learning in lessons and make a strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Year group assemblies are used to enrich students' understanding about spiritual, moral and cultural issues. During the inspection a Year 9 assembly was observed on the theme of 'what is a bad conscience?' Students made their own contributions by suggesting their ideas, providing a high-quality musical performance and reflecting on the question, 'Is it easier to deal with a bad reputation than a bad conscience?'
- **The governance of the school:**
 - As a United Learning academy, governance is shared between the local governing board and United Learning. Governors provide good support and challenge. Together with the academy trustees, they check all aspects of the academy's work. Board members meet with faculty leaders and senior leaders to ask challenging questions. They analyse students' performance data and staff performance, including the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of teaching, and use the information to provide an ambitious direction for the academy. Trustees make sure that the performance targets set for the Principal are challenging and that rewards for teachers are suitably based on their performance. Oversight of the academy's finances is rigorous. For example, the governing board makes sure that information about the pupil premium funding expenditure is available on the academy website for parents. Governors are keen to show that the funding is used to make a measurable difference to the achievement of the students for whom it is intended. Governors are diligent in making sure that all safeguarding and child protection policies and practices meet national requirements and that staff and students work within a safe environment.

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	134814
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	402639

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

Type of school	Academy sponsor-led
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	1380
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	191
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael George
Principal	Anne Hill
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2010
Telephone number	01604 402811
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