

Hope Academy

Ashton Road, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside, WA12 0AQ

Inspection dates 25–26 April 2013

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		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students' achievement is low. Results in 2012 showed significant underachievement in Year 11 and in the sixth form.
- Academy tracking data and early GCSE results indicate an improving trend although this is slower for boys than girls and is not yet good.
- Higher-ability boys underachieve, particularly in English.
- Not enough teaching is good or outstanding, resulting in too few students making good progress.
- Students and their parents have raised significant concerns about bullying and poor behaviour.
- Leaders and managers have underestimated some of the academy's key weaknesses and the impact that these have on students' overall achievement.
- Governors do not effectively hold the academy to account.

The school has the following strengths

- Current academy data indicates that the gap between the achievement of students eligible for free school meals and their peers is closing to in-line with national averages.
- The merger of two schools into an academy has been managed effectively.
- Senior leaders and governors have an ambitious vision and high expectations for the future of the academy.
- Middle leaders share the leadership's ambitions for the academy and have worked hard to implement strategies and procedures for improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 55 teachers in 56 lessons including two joint observations with members of the academy’s senior team. Other aspects of the academy’s work seen included an assembly and tutorials. Inspectors also held meetings with over 40 students from all year groups.
- Meetings were held with the Principal, representatives of the academy sponsor and governing body, senior leaders, middle leaders and other academy staff. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Inspectors took account of the 106 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), letters and emails received from parents, and the academy’s own student’, and parent questionnaires.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including minutes of the meetings of the governing body, the academy’s self-evaluation, and data relating to students’ achievement.

Inspection team

Janet Palmer, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Bernard Robinson	Additional Inspector
Drew Crawshaw	Her Majesty’s Inspector
David Bridgewater	Additional Inspector
Lisa Fraser	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Hope Academy is larger than the average-sized secondary school
- The academy opened in September 2011, merging Newton Community High School and St Aelred's Catholic Technology College.
- The academy is sponsored by the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool, the Church of England Diocese of Liverpool and Liverpool Hope University.
- The proportion of students that the academy has identified as disabled or having special educational needs, therefore requiring extra support through 'school action' or 'school action plus' is below the national average.
- A smaller than average proportion of students has a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average.¹
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- A small number of students attend courses off-site at the PACE and Launchpad pupil referral units, St Helen's College, and the Building Futures vocational skills centre.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve progress overall and in particular the progress made by boys who enter the school with high levels of achievement and students supported by 'school action plus' by:
 - ensuring that targets are appropriate and matched by high expectations in lessons
 - ensuring that assessment data is accurate and used in lessons to check that all students make good progress, including high-ability boys and those supported by additional funding to meet their special educational needs.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - increasing creativity, innovation and independence so that lessons are more stimulating and enjoyable
 - sharing the practice of the best teachers to show how high expectations can raise achievement
 - stabilising the teaching staff to reduce the reliance on temporary supply teachers.
- Improve behaviour and safety across the school by:
 - ensuring teachers take full responsibility for managing behaviour through effective teaching
 - seeking the views of students about what needs to be done to help them manage their behaviour and routinely treat each other with respect
 - ensuring students have confidence in the academy's systems for preventing and tackling all forms of bullying
 - providing training for all staff on how to deal with derogatory language particularly

¹ The pupil premium is specific, additional funding provided to support the education of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years, children who have been looked after continuously for a period of six months and children whose parents are currently serving in the armed forces.

homophobic taunts.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring the accuracy of self-evaluation that is based on robust evidence and includes the views of students
 - ensuring staff training is appropriate and effective in raising standards across the school
 - improving the ability of governors to hold the school to account by enhancing their understanding of robust self-evaluation.

An external evaluation of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Examination results in 2012 were well below the national average. Early entry GCSE results for mathematics and the academy's own achievement data indicate that results are now improving to be mostly in-line with national averages.
- In 2012 the attainment gap between students eligible for the pupil premium and other students in the academy was 35 percentage points for English and 41 percentage points for mathematics. Students eligible for the pupil premium in Key Stage 3 are now involved in programmes designed to improve the performance of disadvantaged groups, and current academy data indicates that the attainment gap is rapidly closing.
- However, the achievement gap between girls and boys is too wide, particularly in English where higher ability boys significantly underachieve compared to higher ability girls. While 33 per cent of girls are recorded as having made four or more levels of progress in English, it is only 13 per cent for boys. Current academy data shows a 28 percentage point difference between the attainment of girls and boys overall at GCSE.
- For the small number of students who have been identified by the academy as requiring support through 'school action plus' the gap has also widened between their performance and that of other students, and is considerably wider than the national average.
- In many of the lessons visited by inspectors students' progress required improvement because the teaching did not always encourage students to strive to reach their full potential.
- In 2012, the GCE A level and GCE AS level results were significantly below national averages; OCR National Certificate results were in-line with the national average. The majority of sixth-form students underachieved because they did not have sufficient prior knowledge to meet the demands of advanced-level courses and a minority do not attend regularly. The academy recognised that the sixth-form curriculum was too narrow and the number of vocational courses has now increased to better meet students' needs and interests and this has resulted in improvements in the progress students are making.
- Students attending off-site courses are effectively monitored and are making progress in-line with expectations.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not good because in half of all lessons seen teaching required improvement or was inadequate, preventing students from making good progress overall. This does not match the academy's own judgement that teaching is mostly good or better.
- Features of the better teaching observed include good use of questioning to deepen students' learning; and creative, interesting activities to capture students' imaginations. In these lessons students engaged with enthusiasm, asked thoughtful questions and clearly enjoyed their learning.
- In the weaker lessons teaching is dull and mechanistic, following a set formula of repeated assessments that slow the pace and fail to enhance students' learning.
- The marking of students' books is variable. The best marking provided useful feedback to help students achieve their targets. However, in some books the marking was cursory or overly positive and did not help students improve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Behaviour and safety are not good because students' attitudes to learning are not consistently good and significant concerns have been raised about behaviour and bullying.

- The behaviour observed in lessons and around the academy was mostly good although poor behaviour was evident where teaching was weak. However, the students that inspectors spoke to said that behaviour seen during the inspection was untypical and lessons were too often disrupted by poor attitudes to learning. Thirty-five per cent of parents who responded to the online survey also expressed the view that students did not behave well.
- Students expressed concerns about bullying, mostly related to appearance or, 'just being different'. All groups spoken to said that homophobic name-calling was commonplace. Approximately half of the students interviewed did not think that bullying was effectively dealt with by the academy and the online survey showed that 22% of parents have similar concerns. However, most parents agreed that their child felt safe in the academy and the students spoken to confirm this.
- Inspectors pursued the issue of bullying further and found records of some homophobic, racist and sexist behaviour and that actions had been taken to deal with the perpetrators. The academy also highlighted the work covered during anti-bullying week and inspectors found good systems in place to prevent and tackle cyber-bullying.
- Attendance is broadly in-line with national averages and the numbers who are temporarily excluded from the academy is reducing.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders, managers and the academy sponsors have an ambitious vision for the academy. They have worked hard to successfully manage the merger of the two predecessor schools.
- Plans to improve students' overall achievement are rightly focused on the quality of teaching. Training to improve the effectiveness of lessons is in place and is beginning to have a positive impact on students' achievement. However, the evaluation of the quality of teaching by senior leaders is over-generous and does not take sufficient account of progress students make in lessons.
- Effective procedures are in place to manage the performance of staff. They are appropriately rewarded and support and training is provided to help teachers improve their performance.
- Safeguarding procedures for students in the academy and at off-site provision meet statutory requirements but too little has been done to ensure students are emotionally safe with regard to bullying and prejudiced-based name-calling.
- The curriculum rightly focuses on improving literacy and numeracy in Years 7 and 8. However, the programmes of study in the thematic curriculum in Key Stage 3 are disjointed and do not adequately build on students' prior learning. After-school clubs and activities are mostly for sports and the performing arts. Participation is monitored but not analysed to see which groups and individuals attend and why others do not. Students interviewed in the sixth form said they do not participate in extra-curricular activities as there is nothing that interests them and that leadership responsibilities are restricted to those with good grades.
- Students in the sixth form are positive about the care, support and guidance they receive and this prepares them well for their next steps. However, leadership of the sixth form requires improvement because the quality of teaching is variable and is not sufficiently well monitored.
- The academy presented inspectors with a great deal of evidence of its provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, outcomes as evidenced in lessons, wider curriculum opportunities and student concerns about behaviour and bullying show that this aspect is not yet good.
- Fifty-seven per cent of parents who responded to the online survey expressed the opinion that the academy is well managed. However, a number of parents were less positive. Although the leadership had been seeking ways to engage parents there is more work to do.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors do not hold the academy sufficiently to account. They have a good understanding

of the finances, including the pupil-premium funding, its purposes and expenditure but have not adequately challenged the accuracy of the leadership's self-evaluation judgements. Governors spend a lot of time approving policies but are largely unaware of the effectiveness of the policies, whether they are understood by staff, or if they are embedded in the culture of the academy.

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	136421
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	399841

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

Type of school	Academy free school
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	1,401
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	168
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bart McGettrick
Principal	John Gannon
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01744 671930
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