

The Quest Academy

Farnborough Avenue, South Croydon, CR2 8HD

Inspection dates 11–12 June 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 | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Achievement is not yet good for all students in all subjects, despite rapid and significant gains since the academy opened.
- Teaching is improving, but there are inconsistencies.
- In some subjects, students' books are not well kept. Not all teachers insist on high enough standards of presentation.
- Marking varies in quality. It is not always regular or helpful enough to ensure that work improves. This is the case in too many mathematics books.
- Rates of exclusion for some persistent poor behaviour are too high.
- The sixth form requires improvement because initial mock examination results show uneven progress, with weakness in science. The sixth form, in its very early stages of development, is not yet good for this reason.

The school has the following strengths

- Strong leadership has led to significant improvements in all areas since the academy opened. It is well on the way to becoming good.
- Earlier this year, the academy received ministerial recognition for improving students' progress and was in the top 100 schools for this achievement.
- Behaviour has been transformed since the academy opened. It is a calm and well-ordered place to learn.
- The pursuit of good or better achievement for every student is at the heart of the academy's work. Achievement gaps between different groups are closing rapidly.
- The Principal, governing body, Executive Principal and Trust share a vision for the academy to provide an outstanding quality of education and are driving improvement relentlessly to this end.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 33 lessons, the majority jointly with senior staff. They also made short visits to classrooms, focusing on the standard and presentation of work in books.
- Inspectors held meetings with staff, students, and representatives of the governing body, of the Trust and of the sponsor. They also held telephone discussions with the member of staff responsible for provision at Croydon College.
- The inspection team scrutinised academy documentation, including self-evaluation, improvement planning, the governing body minutes and policies.
- Inspectors took account of the views of the 20 parents and carers who had responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) by the end of the inspection, and two who wrote or telephoned to express their views, as well as the results of the academy’s own surveys of parents’ and carers’ views.
- Inspectors also took account of the views of 25 staff who returned inspection questionnaires.

Inspection team

Christine Raeside, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Samuel Ofori-Kyereh

Additional Inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional Inspector

Andrew Lyons

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Quest Academy is a smaller than average secondary school. There are more boys than girls on roll.
- The academy opened in September 2010 on the site of the predecessor school. It is sponsored by the Coloma Trust and Coloma Convent Girls' School.
- Over half of students are supported by pupil premium funding. This is additional money provided to schools by the government, for students known to be eligible for free school meals, who are looked after by the local authority, or are children of families in the armed services.
- A higher-than-average proportion of students in Year 7 are eligible for support from the Catch-Up Premium, government funding to support those entering secondary school below Level 4 in English and/or mathematics.
- About one quarter of students are at the school action stage of support for special educational needs. The proportion at the school action plus stage, or with a statement of special educational needs, is higher than the national average.
- The majority of students belong to minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being of African or Caribbean heritage; about 30% are White British. Over 40% of students speak English as an additional language.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 attend work-related courses at Croydon College.
- A higher than usual proportion of students join or leave the academy during the school year at other than the conventional times.
- The academy launched its sixth form provision, Quest 6, in September 2012.
- Construction of a new building is imminent, with completion anticipated for September 2014.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain the rise in standards and increased levels of progress for all students so that progress exceeds national expectations across all subjects and for all groups of students, particularly in English and mathematics, in September 2013 and from then on.
- Secure and sustain high achievement through teaching that is consistently good, and more that is outstanding, by making sure that all teachers:
 - have consistently high expectations of all students, irrespective of their starting points
 - adopt the best practice in the academy by questioning students in ways that promote thinking and deepen learning
 - demand work from all students that is completed and presented to a high standard
 - make sure that all students receive high-quality advice on how to improve their work through marking and assessment that is as good as the best in the academy, and that they act on it
 - promote and develop high standards of basic literacy and numeracy for all students through the thorough and consistent implementation of academy policy.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In the academy's first two years, GCSE results have improved significantly. Predictions for 2013 indicate a further rise in attainment to above the national average. Given that students enter the academy with attainment significantly below average, this shows that progress is accelerating year on year.
- In English and mathematics, far more students make progress in line with national expectations than in the past. In 2012, there were still inconsistencies, however. Girls made much better progress than boys in English; boys attained higher grades in mathematics than girls.
- Students eligible for support through the pupil premium achieved a GCSE average points score in 2012 lower than their peers, but by a margin half the size of the gap nationally. Just over half of this group made the expected progress in English; almost 60% made the expected progress in mathematics.
- Students who belong to minority ethnic backgrounds, such as those of African or Caribbean heritage and those who speak English as an additional language, achieve better than their White British peers. Students arriving at different points in the school year receive good support to catch up quickly.
- The progress made by disabled students and those with special educational needs is improving, but has in the past been mixed. Progress for this group was significantly below average overall in 2012.
- The academy makes careful choices about when to enter students early for GCSE mathematics and has used this strategy to build students' confidence that they will achieve target grades. Confirmed results for 2013 already show a rising trend in mathematics attainment and improved progress for all groups, including girls.
- Across subjects, achievement varies. Attainment in 2012 was too low in a range of subjects. In many lessons, students learn well, especially in English, where teaching is consistently good. In mathematics, achievement is improving but has been more patchy because of weaknesses in teaching and difficulties recruiting good teachers. A concerted approach to GCSE attainment has compensated for this in Year 11, as strongly improving results indicate, but teaching in mathematics still has not settled into as evenly strong a pattern as in English.
- Students attending Croydon College are achieving well because they are carefully matched to appropriate courses. They attend well and the academy monitors their achievement and well-being closely.
- Early indicators are that progress is accelerating for sixth form students as they adapt to the increased challenge of AS level. The exception to this is science, where very few passed the first mock examination.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- In a few lessons, achievement is outstanding because teachers are sharply attuned to students' learning needs and starting points. Work is carefully designed to stretch and challenge all levels of ability and teaching is adapted according to the progress different students make in the course of the lesson. Questioning is well targeted and the teacher never settles for the quick, easy or obvious answer.
- In the best lessons, teachers strike the right balance between teacher explanation and student discussion. Students are actively involved in the lesson. They think for themselves about how to approach a problem. Teachers vary tasks to make sure the brightest are challenged and the least able well supported. They mark books regularly with precise advice for improvement and make sure students act on this.
- Where teaching still requires improvement, it is because expectations are too low, the pace of learning is too slow, or activities demand too little. Sometimes, a single task is used for all

students, irrespective of their ability, or work is repeated which students can already do. There are cases of marking not being done, or of over-reliance on self- and peer- assessment, with insufficient guidance from the teacher. Where teaching is weaker, students' books reflect this by being poorly kept, with incomplete work and poor standards of basic literacy. Not enough has been done to ensure that all teachers demand high-quality, complete, well-presented work.

- Some sixth form teaching, such as in economics, mathematics and English Literature, is outstanding. In the best lessons, students are well supported to make the transition to a higher level of academic study and encouraged to become genuinely enquiring learners.
- Good lessons enable students to explore and share a range of cultural experiences, such as in music, where teaching led students to a better understanding of the use of different types of rhythm in African drumming.
- There are sound policies in place to promote good basic literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects, but this is not having a strong enough impact on students' work. Some teachers take care to remind students of spelling, grammar and punctuation rules in their marking, but this is inconsistent.
- Good planning usually ensures that the needs of students with additional language or learning needs are well supported. Occasionally, teaching assistants are not well enough prepared for the lesson to ensure that these students learn as well as others.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- There have been dramatic improvements in behaviour since the academy opened. Expectations and standards of good behaviour are clear and well enforced; students know where they stand. Parents and carers indicate through academy and inspection surveys that behaviour has improved and that students are safe and well cared for.
- In lessons, behaviour is usually good. Students comply with teachers' expectations and, when teaching is good, attitudes to learning are highly positive. In less successful lessons, students are more passive or inclined to drift off task. Behaviour is less good for supply teachers than for permanent staff who are familiar to students.
- Behaviour around the academy is safe and good-natured, but at times, over-exuberant and less considerate of others than it might be.
- Bullying is not perceived as a major issue by students, who express confidence that academy leaders will deal with any issues they report. A few, however, did indicate nervousness about the possible consequences of reporting another student.
- Recorded incidents of poor behaviour in lessons are dropping rapidly from extremely high levels inherited by the academy, although students report that they do still occur.
- Permanent and fixed-term exclusions were unacceptably high in the past but are dropping fast. Fixed-term exclusions remain higher than academy leaders would wish, but reflect their intolerance of particularly challenging behaviour.
- Since the academy opened, attendance has improved year on year. It remains lower than the national average, and particularly low for White British students, but the gap is closing. The proportion of students persistently absent from school has almost halved, but remains above the national average.

The leadership and management

are good

- Under the very strong leadership of the Principal, the academy has achieved significant improvements in all areas of its work.
- The drive for improvement is unrelenting, and underpinned by clear systems of accountability. Academy aims are known and shared by all staff, and are a consistent feature of all improvement targets.

- There has been a drive to recruit talented, committed, creative teachers. This has sometimes meant staffing turbulence where the calibre of applicants has not been high enough and posts have remained unfilled or temporary.
 - Senior leaders are themselves models of outstanding teaching; their judgements about the quality of teaching are sharp and accurate.
 - The academy makes effective use of partnerships to develop teaching, such as an innovative programme of teacher development run with a designated Teaching School and a pioneering project using video analysis to improve teaching, run in conjunction with the sponsor school.
 - The Principal holds staff firmly to account for the quality of their teaching and its impact on learning. He monitors target setting for all staff carefully to make sure that aspirations are high. Along with the governing body, he awards or withholds pay progression appropriately according to performance against targets.
 - The offer of courses is widening and better balanced between GCSE and other courses than in the past. The enrichment programme is innovative. Students enjoy the challenge of additional study aligned to their personal interests. For example, students in Years 7 and 8 reading the modern classic '1984' discussed the book's relevance to current affairs and its allegorical representation of Russian political history.
 - Reluctant, weak or hesitant readers are well supported through Year 7 catch-up groups and the 'Stepping Stones' programme. For example, students in Year 8 had help with understanding the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* before encountering it in an English lesson.
 - Students learn to take responsibility for their own and others' learning by becoming mentors to younger children and are well prepared for leadership elections by an academy-wide focus on democracy.
 - Systems to safeguard and protect children from harm are sound and thorough; the register of staff meets statutory requirements.
 - The sponsor school provides leadership expertise and experience that has been invaluable to the academy, particularly in areas of staffing, financial management and in establishing the sixth form. Teachers and subject leaders from the sponsor school readily support the academy by providing additional teachers or helping to develop subject leader expertise.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are a significant strength, with wide-ranging expertise from education and business. They know well where strengths and weaknesses in teaching lie. They understand information about students' progress very well and make astute comparisons with other schools, locally and nationally. Their financial acumen is helping steer the academy out of an inherited budget deficit. They know how pupil and Year 7 catch-up premium funding is deployed and question academy leaders closely about its impact on achievement. Governors firmly support an uncompromising approach from the Principal in challenging ineffective teaching and in linking pay to performance. They are rightly proud of the unusual model of a faith school sponsoring a non-denominational academy. They are impassioned in their pursuit of excellence for all students in the community.
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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 | 136203 |
| Local authority | Croydon |
| Inspection number | 399821 |

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

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|---|-------------------------------|
| Type of school | Academy sponsor-led |
| School category | Community |
| 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 | 483 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 27 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Philip Burley |
| Headteacher | Andrew Crofts |
| Date of previous school inspection | Not previously inspected |
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