

Oxford Spires Academy

Glanville Road, Oxford, OX4 2AU

Inspection dates

9–10 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	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.

- This is an ambitious and rapidly improving academy. The dedicated and energetic Principal and her team have successfully raised standards of students' progress, behaviour and well-being since the academy opened.
- Students make impressive progress from their starting points, attaining results that are sometimes significantly above national expectations, especially in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is good and improving. Teachers follow the example of the academy leaders in their dedication and determination that all students are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Students are valued as individuals. Their progress and personal development are checked frequently. Extra help is provided when needed and no student is left behind.
- The sixth form is good and improving. Students are taught well and make good progress in a well-planned range of courses to suit their abilities.
- Behaviour is good and often outstanding. The academy is safe and welcoming. Tolerance, equality and harmony are promoted seriously and are integral to the life of the academy.
- Students are proud of the academy and thrive on the opportunities to compete and participate in the range of enrichment activities on offer. They feel safe and enjoy their learning and being part of the academy family.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A minority of teaching does not engage all students' interest and encourage good attitudes to learning.
- Students do not do well in a few subjects such as geography and history.
- Students are not given enough opportunities to act upon the advice given by their teachers and improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 33 lessons, including eight jointly observed with senior leaders. They also made several short visits to lessons.
- Inspectors observed assemblies, break times and lunchtimes. They looked at a range of students' work and listened to students reading in lessons.
- Inspectors met with the Principal, senior leaders, middle leaders and a group of teachers.
- They met with the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors.
- Inspectors evaluated the ways in which the academy checks the quality of teaching and the academy's records of teachers' pay progression and performance management.
- Inspectors took into account 32 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 39 responses to the paper-based staff questionnaire. The lead inspector received three emails about the academy.
- Inspectors checked the academy's records of students' attainment and progress, previous and current figures for attendance and exclusion, behaviour logs, safeguarding and child protection records.
- They also checked the attendance and results of students taken off roll since the academy opened, who attend alternative courses in a specialist independent school set up by the academy trust.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jerry Giles

Additional Inspector

Sandra Teacher

Additional Inspector

Carol Worthington

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Oxford Spires Academy opened in January 2011 on the site of the predecessor school, Oxford School. It is sponsored by the CfBT Education Trust.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- About two thirds of the students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of Asian and Asian British origin. One third of the students are White British.
- Nearly half the students speak English as an additional language, although few are in the early stages of English acquisition.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much larger than the national average. A very small number of students are looked after by the local authority. These students are supported through additional pupil premium funding.
- Over a quarter of the students are disabled or have special educational needs. The proportion of students supported at school action is similar to the national average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above the national average.
- The proportion of students who join the academy at times other than the beginning of Year 7 is high.
- The academy meets the current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy works in partnership with Include, which is an independent school catering for students whose circumstances make them at risk of exclusion or underachievement. In the current year group, two students have been taken off the academy roll and are attending full-time courses at Include. Some students attend alternative courses at The Art Room, which is a separate provision for students joining the academy or whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make all teaching good or outstanding by:
 - providing exciting and inspiring resources that will interest and engage all students
 - making sure that more-able students are fully challenged and encouraged to work on their own rather than awaiting direction from the teacher.
- Make sure that all teachers provide students with clear guidance about how to improve their work and give students enough time to act upon their advice.
- Ensure that students are making consistently good or better progress in weaker subject areas such as geography and history.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C or better, including English and mathematics, has risen considerably since the academy opened and is now close to the national average. However, students did not achieve as good results in science, geography and history in 2012.
- Students join the academy with starting points that are well below the national average. Students on roll from Year 7 to Year 11 make rapid and sustained progress, achieving results that are now in line with national expectations. Students make particularly impressive progress in English and mathematics, often exceeding expected rates of progress, compared with students in similar schools.
- Students of middle and lower ability and those who belong to multi-ethnic groups make good progress. Students who speak English as an additional language do well and quickly acquire the necessary skills they need.
- Students who join the academy at times other than Year 7 make good progress as a result of the targeted support they receive. They soon catch up with others in the academy.
- The large number of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium achieve exceptionally well. Their achievement in both English and mathematics shows that they are catching up with other students in the academy and nationally.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress in line with their peers in the academy.
- The small number of more-able students does not do as well as other groups of students. The academy has taken steps to improve the progress of this group of students and there are clear signs that more-able students will achieve better results in 2013.
- Students join the sixth form with below average attainment. A rigorous induction programme ensures that they are well equipped for the demands of their courses. Students make good progress in a range of courses and subjects although their results are below the national average for students in other schools.
- The academy enters students early for mathematics GCSE. They retake the examination in Year 11 to improve their grades or to reach their target. This is a successful strategy, as shown by the good mathematics results, including those at the highest grades, which compare favourably with those in other subjects and are approaching the national average for grades A and A*.
- Students who attend alternative provision make good progress with their courses, achieving better results than predicted. Students attending 'Include' receive specialist tuition from teachers from the academy, ensuring that they are able to follow appropriate courses to match their abilities and career plans.
- Successful programmes of additional support and specialist lessons in English as an additional language support those students who struggle with reading.
- Students read accurately, and effective programmes to encourage reading for pleasure, supported by a well-equipped library, are having a positive impact on students' progress and preparing them well for higher education and employment.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching is good, as a result of effective monitoring and a helpful programme of training and support for teachers. The best lessons are characterised by strong subject knowledge, careful planning of activities and challenging goals for individual students. In a minority of teaching there are missed opportunities to engage and inspire students through interesting choices of resources.
- There is a warm rapport between teachers and students. Students appreciate the good teaching

they receive and take learning very seriously. Students work purposefully in lessons: they want to learn and they know how important it is to make progress. Inspectors were impressed with the studious atmosphere in lessons and the students' levels of concentration when they were fully engaged in their work

- Students work together well. They are expected to discuss each other's work and be critical and evaluative. Students know their targets and they have a clear idea about what to do to improve.
- Teaching assistants are used effectively to support students, particularly for those students who are in the early stages of learning English.
- Some marking and feedback are helpful to students but in some subjects students do not receive enough advice about their work and are not given enough time to make improvements.
- Very occasionally more-able students are not challenged to explore ideas at a sufficiently deep level to attain the highest standards: the work is too easy and places a ceiling on their achievement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour has improved significantly since the academy opened. Students' behaviour is consistently good, but is not yet outstanding overall, because a very few students become inattentive and distracted when the teaching is less than good. Some students are not yet sufficiently independent and confident as learners and rely too much on their teachers for direction.
- The academy has successfully created a strong sense of identity and students are justifiably proud of the 'family atmosphere'. Students thrive on the opportunities to participate in activities such as sports day, charity events, poetry competitions and art exhibitions.
- The house system provides a sense of belonging and healthy competition. The house system has broken down barriers between groups of students and relationships are extremely harmonious.
- Students feel safe and valued as individuals and are confident that they will get help and support. Bullying is rare. Students are aware of the different types of bullying and they are confident that any concerns will be dealt with effectively.
- Behaviour and safety are managed extremely well. Academy leaders are watchful for local concerns, respond in a timely way and ensure that students are given good guidance about how to keep safe and avoid taking risks.
- Good attendance is a top priority for the academy. Students attend well and the number of exclusions has fallen since the academy opened. High expectations have been established and students appreciate the clear boundaries they are given.

The leadership and management are good

- Ambition and determination drive this improving academy. The Principal sets the tone with her tireless dedication to achieving the best outcomes for students. Senior leaders lead by example in their own teaching and also through high expectations and understanding of the students as individuals.
- Typical of the academy's focus on students as individuals is the careful tracking and checking of performance. The Principal makes a point of meeting with each Year 10 student formally to discuss their academic, personal and career goals. Students told inspectors how this made them feel valued and special.
- The focus on students' progress is supported by careful provision and additional classes or support for those students at risk of underperformance. Specific programmes are extremely effective in helping students catch up in order to make steady progress.
- The school's self-evaluation is astute and analytical. Academy leaders are honest about the further work that needs to be done to improve marking and teaching in some subjects.
- Academy leaders check and monitor teachers' work carefully and regularly. Teachers do not

progress through the paycales and receive financial rewards unless they meet their challenging targets and their students achieve well.

- The academy benefits from effective support for leadership and development of teachers from the sponsor, CfBT Education Trust.
- The range of subjects on offer to the students matches their abilities and aspirations. The academy is moving towards a more academic range of courses to enable students to have higher aspirations and aim for university. Courses that focus on work-related learning are highly successful.
- The sixth form offers a good range of opportunities for students to prepare for the world of work or for higher education, depending on their abilities and skills. Teaching in the sixth form is improving and is increasing students' confidence and raising their aspirations.
- Tolerance, creativity and respect shine through the academy. Assemblies emphasise these core values and promote equal opportunities. Students designed and help to tend the memorial garden, showing reflection and reverence. The academy has appointed a writer in residence who has focused on promoting poetry and students have performed and published their work.
- The academy has forged strong links with the local area, promoting tolerance and community spirit. All parents who responded to the online survey recommended the academy. It is clear from the number of positive comments seen during the inspection from parents and other members of the community that the reputation of the academy is growing.
- All safeguarding requirements meet statutory requirements. All academy staff are completely committed to students' safety and well-being.

■ **The governance of the school:**

The governing body has a good grasp of the academy's strengths and areas to improve in teaching and students' progress. Governors come from a range of backgrounds and experience, some from education and some with knowledge of the local area, which is put to good use when evaluating improvements in the academy. Governors have an accurate picture of how the academy is performing when compared with schools nationally. They have detailed information about the quality of teaching in the academy and are fully involved in the Principal's decisions about teachers' pay progression and performance management. The governing body has effectively supported the Principal in making difficult decisions about staffing changes, including redundancies. Governors have attended relevant training in order to help them challenge academy leaders to provide the best support for students who need extra help. They understand how the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium funding are used to support students and they review the outcomes.

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	136261
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	399829

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	790
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	201
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tony Brett
Principal	Sue Croft
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01865 428200
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