

Hall Cross Academy

Thorne Road, Doncaster, DN1 2HY

Inspection dates 30 April–1 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	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.

- Since the last inspection, leaders have successfully improved the quality of teaching and, as a result, students now achieve well, particularly in Years 7 to 11. Achievement in mathematics has risen markedly over the past year, particularly for the most able students.
- Students supported by the pupil premium achieve well. Gaps in the attainment between these students and their peers are closing quickly.
- Teaching is good with some that is outstanding.
- Strong working partnerships between staff and students lead to a culture of learning that supports good progress.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning have improved and are now good. Disruptions to learning are rare.
- Students feel safe and there are good systems in place to keep them safe in the academy.
- The skills of leaders at all levels, including governors, have developed well. They have ensured that students' achievement, behaviour and attendance have all improved and have the ability to continue to do so.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The sixth form requires improvement. In some subjects, sixth form students do not make consistently good progress because they are insufficiently challenged.
- Some new policies and actions by the academy have yet to impact on students' achievement in all subjects, particularly in the sixth form.
- Not all teachers apply a consistent approach to assessing students' achievement or provide work that challenges, inspires and engages them.
- Although attendance is improving, an above average proportion of students are still regularly absent.
- Not all middle leaders hold teachers fully to account for the progress their students make.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons or parts of lessons across all key stages within the academy, including two that were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Formal discussions were held with the Principal, governors and trust members, senior and middle leaders, four groups of students and staff.
- A scrutiny of students' work was carried out during lesson observations and additionally as a separate exercise to identify the current progress of students and trends over time.
- Inspectors listened to Year 7 students reading. These students are participating in a reading catch-up programme as part of the academy's approach to improving standards in English.
- A range of supporting documents relating to students' progress over time, safeguarding and child-protection procedures, minutes of governing body meetings and those relating to the academy's own view of more recent achievement, teaching and future improvement were scrutinised.
- Inspectors observed behaviour in lessons, at break and lunchtime, and after school as well as scrutinising the academy's inclusion policies and procedures.
- The inspectors took account of 53 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 57 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire and a phone call from a parent.
- A serious incident that occurred at the academy since the previous education inspection has been investigated by the appropriate authorities and is now closed. Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind. The welfare provision in academy was evaluated against the regulations that are in place and inspection judgements are based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection.

Inspection team

Colin Scott, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Judith Gooding	Additional Inspector
Steven Beverley	Additional Inspector
Sonya Williamson	Additional Inspector
Peter Monfort	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is much larger than other secondary schools and the largest in Doncaster. 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. There is growing proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional 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 school action plus, or with a statement of special educational needs, is also below average.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium is above average. Pupil premium funding supports those who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of a local authority.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- Hall Cross is a member of the Yorkshire Education Trust, which is an informal partnership with three other academies, designed to promote collaboration and improvement across the participating schools, including support for training new teachers and the development of staff.
- The academy has alternative provision arrangements through the Doncaster Local Partnership at the Keepmoat Stadium in Doncaster supporting some students in Key Stage 3.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of students in the sixth form so their progress at least matches that seen in Key Stages 3 and 4 by:
 - extending the strategies that have successfully improved teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 to the sixth form
 - making good use of the information about students' achievement to provide work which consistently challenges students of all abilities.
- Improve further the quality of teaching, especially in the sixth form, so that the overall quality is outstanding and students reach higher levels of attainment by making sure that:
 - learning is always checked regularly so that it is adapted quickly to stretch, inspire and engage students of all abilities so that they always excel in their learning
 - all marking is as good as the best evident in the academy.
- Further strengthen the skills of middle leaders so that they can effectively hold teachers to account for the progress their students make in their areas of responsibility.
- Sharpen the academy's checks on students' attendance in order to improve it even further, especially to reduce the number of students who are regularly absent.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the academy with attainment that is broadly average and leave Year 11 with attainment in English and mathematics that is above average. The proportion of students leaving Year 11 with five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, has risen and is above the national average.
- Between Years 7 to 11 an above-average proportion of students now make faster progress in English and mathematics than do so nationally. This represents good achievement overall.
- Since the last inspection, the academy has improved the system of tracking the progress of different groups of students, including the most able. This is helping to target more carefully the support given to students with varying needs and abilities and is leading to good progress for most students in Key Stages 3 and 4, including the most able.
- The Principal has been quick to identify any areas of weaknesses in students' achievements since the last inspection and has implemented actions taken to improve achievement. These actions have successfully reversed a very small decline in the proportion of students in Year 11 in 2013 achieving five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. The academy's data and inspection evidence show that the progress of current students is showing an improving trend in most subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4. As a result, a higher proportion of students currently in Year 11 are on track to achieve five good GCSE grades than last year.
- The few students who are entered early for GCSE English and mathematics achieve well. Leaders consider carefully who they enter early for examinations and the reasons for doing so in order to ensure that students are able to reach their potential in those subjects, including the most able.
- In the sixth form, the achievement of students is more varied than in Key Stages 3 and 4 and, although improving, it still requires further improvement. Despite improvements to the way in which sixth-form students' progress is tracked, this information is not yet used effectively to ensure that work is provided which fully challenges students of varying abilities in all subjects.
- Students targeted for the Year 7 catch-up programme are making good progress to reach the similar standards as their peers. Their reading skills are well developed, supporting their chances of achieving even higher results as they move through the academy. One Year 7 student remarked that he, 'now feels much more confident reading, asking for help less and can help others'.
- Students who are supported by the pupil premium, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, make similar progress to other students in the academy. Gaps in the attainment between eligible students and their peers are closing quickly. Inspection evidence shows that since 2011 this gap has reduced considerably. This shows that the pupil premium is well used to impact positively on the achievement of these students.
- Effective support for the small but growing proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language, ensures they can access the curriculum fully and make good progress.
- Although the academy is successful in reducing gaps in achievement between groups of students and promoting equality of opportunity, leaders are yet to ensure that students in the sixth form achieve as well as in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- The few students in Key Stage 3 who receive their education off-site enjoy their learning, attend regularly and achieve as well as their peers in the academy.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers are committed to their students and usually set high expectations for them with aspirational targets. The level of aspiration has improved rapidly because teachers are supported to develop their skills through regular training and professional development.

- Staff know their subjects well and students draw on this knowledge with confidence that what they are being taught is helping them to learn well.
- Since the last inspection, the academy has invested heavily in developing the skills of teachers to be able to identify and track the progress of groups of students, particularly that of the most able. Procedures for assessing students' skills and abilities are now more robust as a result and students' achievement continues to improve. Even so, assessment information is not always used to provide activities that take full account of what students already know and can do. This is particularly the case in the sixth form where work sometimes lacks enough challenge for students of varying abilities. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is variable and so progress in some subjects is not yet good, for example, in graphic products.
- Students' progress is usually checked regularly and learning is well adapted throughout activities to keep the level of challenges high and so students are inspired and engaged fully in learning. This leads to good and sometimes outstanding progress. However, this is not the case during all activities and so learning occasionally slows.
- The quality of marking is good overall. There are examples of exemplary practice which enables students to consolidate their understanding through very high-quality feedback, gives them time to reflect on it and continually challenges them to improve and do harder work. Not all marking is of best quality however and, as a result, some students are not as well informed of exactly how they can improve.
- Students say that teaching is much better now than previously. One student told inspectors that she could, 'see how the most able students are now supported by the teachers more'. Students themselves have been able to play a part in improving the quality of teaching. For example, students have observed teaching in their lessons, offering advice as to how teachers could improve. As a result, students know that teachers really want to do the best they can for them.
- Teaching assistants and other support staff are deployed appropriately across the academy. They provide additional support and nurture to students who need extra help to learn.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students say they feel safe, such as in practical lessons and using online technology and say that the academy encourages them to adopt safe and responsible practices. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to Parent View agree that their children are kept safe.
- Procedures to check the credentials of staff are well kept and systems to record any incidents of bullying are secure. The academy works hard to ensure there is a culture of openness. Both staff and students are keenly aware and confident in being able to express an opinion or to report any concerns.
- Students help to develop the academy's ethos and practices, which impacts positively on their sense of belonging. Students helped to develop a new policy for the academy's 'Bring Your Own Device' to learn programme, encouraging safe and responsible use of personal technology to support learning. Behavioural issues surrounding mobile phones are minimal.
- The academy has developed support for improving behaviour called 'STEAM' (short-term exclusion and management) and is particularly effective in helping the few students who find behaving well more difficult. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced and are now average and permanent exclusions are rare.
- The behaviour of students, including in the sixth form, is good.
- Any behaviour problems that affect learning in lessons are rare and, as a result, students are able to learn well. Most students take pride in their work and want to achieve well. A small minority do not always present their work to the best of their ability however.
- The vast majority of staff and parents agree that students are well behaved. Students say that bullying is rare but when it does happen it is dealt with quickly and effectively.
- Teachers and students share a respect for each other. One student stated that, 'teachers treat you like an adult'. As students move between lessons and around the school there is a very

harmonious dialogue between staff and students. Students are happy, calm and enjoying school

- Attendance has varied in recent years but has improved and is now average. Persistent absence has reduced but has yet to reach the levels found nationally.

The leadership and management are good

- Since the last inspection, the Principal has quickly acted to address the areas identified as in need of improvement to ensure that students' achievement is good.
- The Principal's strong drive for success has already resulted in a community that is solidly behind the driving improvements further forward. Most staff and parents agree that the academy is well led and managed.
- With the support of governors and the trust, the Principal has enacted a major restructure of middle leaders. Leaders are now better placed to help drive improvements forward at a better rate. Middle leaders are sharp at identifying weaker progress in subject areas and use this knowledge well to ensure that additional support for students is quickly established.
- Although middle leaders check that newly established policies and procedures are impacting positively in their areas of responsibility, they do not all yet hold teachers fully to account for their students' progress.
- New leadership in the sixth form has already made rapid progress in improving the tracking and support of students. These are yet to have any significant impact on speeding up students' progress overall however.
- The leadership of teaching is good. There has been a strong, relentless and focused drive among leaders and governors to improve teaching. The academy's view of the quality of teaching is accurate. There are more rigorous performance-management procedures in place. Progression up the pay scale is not automatic. Robust practices make it clear to teachers what they need to do in order to move to higher pay scales, especially in linking their performance to students' progress.
- Procedures for assessing students' skills, abilities and progress have strengthened, with a clearer emphasis on making sure all students make good progress.
- The academy's evaluation of its own effectiveness is very accurate and honest. Leaders have correctly identified the areas for further development. Actions to improve them are well underway and so achievement is continuing to improve.
- The curriculum is fit for purpose, broad and balanced. Students say that if a particular subject is not on offer to them, the academy would do its best to find a way of including it. There is a wide variety of opportunities for learning beyond the classroom, including sporting activities, which are highly regarded by students.
- Opportunities for developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are often embedded in lessons as well as regularly in assemblies. For example, the 'H-Bacc' (Hall Cross Baccalaureate) in Key Stage 3 supports the development of students' group working skills, as well as offering students time to reflect, to develop their understanding of the world around us and diverse communities and their history.
- Leaders ensure the pupil premium funding is used to good effect. The achievement and attendance of eligible students have improved.
- The academy and the governing body receive support via the trust arrangement between it and three other academies. Governors say they welcome the advice and challenge they receive greatly.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors responded swiftly following the previous inspection to help address the identified weaknesses and to drive improvement forward at a good rate. Their skills in holding the academy to account have developed well since the last inspection. Governors now offer a good level of challenge to the Principal and other leaders. Minutes of governing body meetings accurately detail the positive impact that governors have by challenging leaders.

- Governors understand the academy's strengths and what it needs to do to bring about further improvement. They are aware of the quality of teaching and have a good understanding on managing teachers' performance and that progression through the pay scale is not automatic and should be remunerated for their level of expertise.
- Governors are well involved in tracking students' progress. They have a good understanding of how well the academy performs in comparison to other schools.
- Governors ensure that extra funding, such as the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up, are used effectively to improve outcomes for those students for whom the money was intended.
- Governors ensure that safeguarding meets legal requirements.

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	137842
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	442291

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy alternative provision converter
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	1,988
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	533
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Philip Marshall
Principal	Pippa Dodgshon
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2012
Telephone number	01302 320626
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	enquiries@hallcrossacademy.co.uk

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