

# Queensbury Academy

Langdale Road, Dunstable, LU6 3BU

## Inspection dates

7–8 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b> <b>2</b>
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.

- The Principal is a strong and effective leader who has skilfully steered the academy's development and is ensuring both teaching and achievement improve. Senior leaders, including governors, share the Principal's ambition and drive.
- Teaching has improved rapidly since the academy opened. It is usually good and sometimes outstanding.
- Standards are rising. Students make good progress across all year groups and in most subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Students feel safe and behave well. Students of all ages show respect and consideration, and their good attitudes to learning contribute positively to their progress and achievement.
- The sixth form is good. Sixth-form students achieve well, and are very well prepared for the next stage of education and adult life.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students make good rather than exceptional progress. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make steady but not rapid progress.
- Some teachers do not use questions to check students' understanding, pitch activities at the right level of difficulty or ensure that their marking always tells students how they should improve their work.
- Beyond English lessons, there are insufficient opportunities for students to practise their literacy skills in other subjects.
- The academy's work to promote students' spiritual and cultural development is not strong enough.
- The academy is only in its second year. Some strategies to engage and involve all students and parents and take account of their views are at an early stage of implementation and have yet to impact fully.

## Information about this inspection

- This two-day inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- Inspectors undertook observations of teaching in 35 lessons, and parts of other lessons during a series of learning walks around the school, some of which were conducted jointly with the senior leaders.
- A range of documentation was analysed, including that relating to safeguarding, student progress, attendance, exclusions, the academy's self-evaluation and its systems for managing teachers' performance and improving teaching and learning.
- Inspectors took account of the 75 responses from parents to the online Parent View survey. They also evaluated parental responses collated by the academy.
- Discussions were held with the Principal, nominated staff, several groups of students, and two representatives from the Academy Trust, including the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body.

## Inspection team

Paul Brooker, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Daniel

Seconded Inspector

Rachel De Souza

Seconded Inspector

Margaret Jones

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Queensbury Academy opened in September 2012 in the accommodation of its predecessor school, Queensbury Upper School. When its predecessor school was last inspected in October 2011 it was judged to require special measures.
- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. In September 2014, it will admit students into Years 7, making it an 11-18 academy.
- The academy is currently in a challenging financial position because of its low number on roll. At the time of the inspection, the academy was implementing a second round of staff redundancy.
- Most students are White British and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding provided by the government to support pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care) is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is slightly above the national figure, but the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.
- Groups of students in Year 10 (16) and Year 11 (21) currently attend alternative provision (education provided by other schools or colleges) at Barnfield College for one day a week, following work-related courses. The academy also has access to three places at the Academy of Central Bedfordshire; this year individual students from Year 10 and Year 11 have accessed this alternative provision on a part-time basis.
- Sixth-form provision is delivered in a collaborative partnership with Manshead Upper School.
- This year, the academy entered a target group of 30 Year 11 students early for GCSE entry in English and used early entry in mathematics for two students.
- The academy meets government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The academy is sponsored by the CfBT Schools Trust.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop teaching of the highest quality so that students make exceptional progress by:
  - replicating more widely the features of outstanding teaching found in the academy
  - ensuring teachers use questions systematically to check and extend students' understanding
  - ensuring that marking shows students how to improve more effectively
  - consolidating and improving students' literacy skills in subjects other than English
  - using more astutely the information about students, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, to plan appropriately demanding lessons and accelerate their progress.
- Embed the strategies that will involve students and parents more fully by:
  - developing parents' involvement in the academy
  - making better use of the 'student voice' to improve provision, especially teaching
  - ensuring that teachers routinely take opportunities to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students make good progress in most subjects, and achieve well in each key stage, including in the sixth form. Students make better than expected progress in English and mathematics.
- The academy's first set of results in 2013 were impressive. Standards at Key Stage 4 were broadly in line with national figures, with above-average achievement in mathematics. However, results in English were lower than expected and not all groups performed equally well. Disabled students and those who had special educational needs achieved less well than expected.
- Since last summer, steps have been taken to address disparities in performance and ensure that the ambitious predictions in English are achieved. Evaluations of students' work and progress confirm that achievement in English is now good. Literacy is well supported in some other subjects, but not consistently well across the academy because teachers do not consistently correct and improve students' writing and reading.
- The academy makes good use of its data-tracking system to accelerate students' progress. Any groups or individuals who are at risk of underachieving are quickly spotted and given additional support. 'Period 6' is routinely timetabled for 'catch up' sessions and intervention classes, which are well attended.
- Disparities in the performance of different groups of students have been ironed out, primarily because teaching is strong. Teachers know their students well and what they can achieve. Consequently, the most-able students are stretched and students' particular learning needs are understood. The impact of targeted support, such as the personalised intervention plans for pupil premium students, is reflected in the accelerated progress of students currently in Year 10 and Year 11.
- Students in alternative provision can access a wide range of work-related qualifications, with suitable levels of accreditation, to help prepare them for the next stage in their education or training. They attend regularly and achieve well, and successfully use these qualifications to secure college places, further training or employment.
- Students for whom the academy receives pupil premium funding make good progress and are narrowing the gap on their peers. In 2013, the proportion of students achieving at least five higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, was 25% lower for the academy's 'pupil premium' students compared with their classmates. This gap has narrowed markedly this year.
- Sixth-form success rates are good because students are carefully guided onto courses that match their aptitudes, so retention rates are high. This, combined with high quality teaching and the good support they receive, ensures that sixth-form students achieve well in most subjects, including academic and vocational options. A significant proportion of students successfully win places at top universities.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching has strengthened, term by term, since the academy opened. Although some classroom practice still requires improvement, effective teaching was seen throughout the academy, in different ability groups and across a range of different subjects.
- Teaching in the sixth form is particularly strong because teachers use their subject expertise to present challenging work to extend students' learning. One strong feature of sixth-form

teaching is the expectation that students take responsibility for their learning so they securely develop skills and understanding of complex processes, as well as subject knowledge. Students' self- and peer-assessments are a key factor in their good achievement. In a Year 12 physical education (PE) lesson for example, students used mini white boards to check their prior learning of the cardiac system, and assess the accuracy of one another's responses, before devising an instructional revision video, using PE equipment.

- One feature common to all the most effective teaching is the positive climate for learning that teachers establish. Teachers have high expectations. They nurture positive attitudes and good work habits so that students are ambitious and take pride in their work, and lessons proceed without interruption. Teaching assistants are sensibly deployed so that their impact and expertise are maximised.
- Marking is mostly regular and, where practice is strong, shows students very clearly how they can improve. The most effective feedback sets out clearly the next steps for improvement, and students are encouraged to respond to this guidance. However, students say that some comments are often too vague to be helpful, and occasionally not even legible.
- Ambitious targets are the norm: the basic expectation is that all students will make at least one level of progress above that expected. The best teaching is rooted in skilful planning that defines ambitious learning outcomes for all groups of students and in the way teachers prepare interesting resources and well-devised activities, including homework tasks, to achieve these.
- Where teaching is not yet good, planning is not precise enough. In a few lessons work was pitched at too high or too low a level for some students because teachers had not used the information they held about students' prior achievement effectively. There is a clear drive to stretch the more-able students in order to improve standards, but students' misconceptions were not tackled when, on occasion, teachers did not question them systematically to check and extend their understanding.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Behaviour is good. Students adhere to the academy's high expectations and behave very well in lessons, at break periods and when moving around the large site. The academy's meticulous records show that the incidence of unacceptable behaviour is being significantly reduced. 'Stepped' sanctions are rarely used because behaviour is consistently good.
- The students' positive attitudes to learning are an important factor in their good achievement. In lessons, there is a palpable trust between adults and students, and between students themselves, so that students feel confident expressing their opinions and asking questions.
- The house system works well and has strengthened the academy community. Tutor groups have been rearranged into smaller, vertically mixed-year groups where students of different ages socialise and look out for one another. Problems are aired and issues resolved before they escalate.
- Students develop personal qualities that prepare them well for the next stage of their education and adult life. Older students appreciate the improvements that the academy's new leadership has brought about. Sixth-form students speak very positively about their experiences, but feel that they could make a wider contribution to life in the academy and its efforts to make improvements.
- Students are punctual and attend well. Attendance during the academy's first year was broadly

average, with low levels of persistent absenteeism.

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good because safeguarding is given a high priority in the everyday life of the academy and on its website. Detailed attention is paid to all aspects of safeguarding, including risk assessments. Students say that they feel well supported and completely safe, both at the academy and when attending alternative provision. Several students new to the academy since the start of the year told inspectors, quite spontaneously, how welcome and well-supported they have felt.
- Students are alert to bullying in all its guises, including cyber-harassment and homophobic bullying, and talk knowledgably and confidently about potential dangers and how to avert and address them. Students are generally very respectful in the way that they interact, and use language carefully, rarely using casual expletives. They recognise that bullying happens, but are confident that issues will be properly resolved.
- Alternative provision supports well those students who are most susceptible to disengagement from school, and has been used successfully to re-integrate individuals at risk of exclusion.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The Principal has skilfully steered the academy's development through a very challenging period, driving essential improvements in behaviour, the quality of teaching and standards. At a time of potentially debilitating staff cuts, the academy has sustained a sharp focus on raising standards and strengthening teaching, with a comparatively small team of senior leaders.
- A good team of middle leaders is developing, with subject leaders taking responsibility for leading learning and guiding teachers' professional development within their faculties. This works particularly well in mathematics. Where this leadership either lacks experience or sharpness, strong oversight by and accountability to, senior leaders ensures that it is effective. The leadership in the sixth form is good.
- The academy has good systems for checking its own effectiveness. Self-evaluation is thorough and accurate. Evaluations undertaken by inspectors aligned closely with those of senior leaders.
- The academy monitors the quality of teaching systematically, but is careful not to judge teachers on 'snapshot' observations of lessons alone. Judgements of teachers' effectiveness take full account of the progress of their students and the quality of their work in books. This monitoring indicates that the quality of teaching has improved significantly since the academy opened, and that most is good.
- The academy has clear-cut arrangements to review the performance of teachers, to tackle under-performance, to reward those who teach effectively and support others so that they improve. The academy has inherited a staff, a large proportion of whom are on the upper pay scale, but teachers' salary progression is tied to evidence of their successful achievement of targets for their performance.
- The curriculum is evolving sensibly. Initially, the academy took advantage of GCSE equivalent qualifications in subjects such as Travel and Tourism and Business to boost standards, but these are now balanced by a suitably broad range of options that meet the needs of different groups. The main curriculum is enhanced by an impressive variety of extra-curricular activities. Enrichment opportunities are plentiful, particularly in music and sport, including through the

house system. Students receive good quality advice to inform their future choices, both from the academy and, independently, from other agencies.

- A recent audit of provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development highlighted strengths and areas that are underdeveloped. The academy promotes students' personal development very well through imaginative and demanding courses, such as philosophy and ethics, and in tutor time and assemblies. Students develop a sense of social responsibility and an appreciation of the beliefs and values of others. They are routinely encouraged to take on leadership and other responsibilities through the house system and in PE.
  - Since the academy opened, a number of developments have been initiated, but the impact of these has yet to be realised. These include strategies for promoting literacy across the curriculum, using the 'student voice' to shape improvements, and developing parental engagement through 'Friends of Queensbury School'. Parents are generally positive about the academy, and are well-informed by the academy's excellent website.
  - The additional government funding provided through the pupil premium has been sensibly allocated to improve the engagement and achievement of targeted students. Most is assigned to salary costs of additional staff, to mentor and support individuals, but expenditure is also allocated to support intervention programmes, and trips and visits to ensure that students have equal access to wider enrichment opportunities.
  - The academy is judicious in drawing on external support, including that provided by the Academy Trust. Challenge and guidance from the Trust Adviser is highly valued, but other training provided by CfBT is not felt by the academy to be of consistently high quality.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The governing body fulfils its responsibilities in regard to safeguarding and ensures that arrangements meet all statutory requirements
  - The local governing body is well-informed about the academy. Governors know about the quality of teaching, how performance management is used to strengthen teaching, and the allocation and impact of pupil premium expenditure. Governors have an excellent grasp of performance data and use their detailed knowledge to provide suitable support and challenge for senior leaders, as necessary
  - Other than making key leadership appointments, CfBT has not played a significant role in the strategic development of the academy. The academy's transformation has been achieved with little material support or guidance from senior leaders from the Academy Trust.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138571
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	440139

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	715
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	220
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Maxine Ward
<b>Principal</b>	Oliver Button
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 October 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 601241
<b>Email address</b>	principal@queensburyacademy.com

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