

Armthorpe Academy

Mere Lane, Doncaster, South Yorkshire, DN3 2DA

Inspection dates 19–20 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Not enough students are making the progress expected of them and the most able students are not always achieving the high grades at GCSE of which they are capable.
- Teachers work harder than students in too many classes and students do not always make productive use of the detailed feedback that teachers provide. Too often they rely on teachers to chivvy them along and keep them focused on their work.
- AS results are below average and the current curriculum is not meeting the needs of all sixth form students effectively. Plans to address this are being developed in partnership with other local providers but they will not be fully implemented until September 2015.

The school has the following strengths

- Achievement is improving well, especially in Key Stage 3 where students are making better progress year-on-year.
- The development of teaching is led well and the quality is improving quickly. Many teachers are relatively new to the profession and have enthusiasm and potential but are still perfecting their skills.
- Behaviour around the academy is good.
- Leadership at all levels, including governance, is good and getting stronger. Leaders have high ambitions for the academy. They know exactly what needs to be done to improve and plans are already underway. Appointments over the past year have strengthened leadership and injected new energy and capacity. Both the senior and middle leadership teams now have a very good blend of experience, flair and pragmatism. The pace of improvement is accelerating as a result.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed seven part lessons, two of which were with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also visited an extensive range of lessons for short periods and observed the behaviour of students in and around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers and representatives of the governing body and the Yorkshire Education Trust.
- Inspectors talked to students in lessons and met formally with three groups of students.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including behaviour and exclusion information, achievement and attendance data, safeguarding information, performance management information, reports to governors and governing body minutes.
- Inspectors also took account of the 66 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).

Inspection team

Jan Bennett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mary Lanovy-Taylor

Additional Inspector

Chris Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- The academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- More students than average are supported at school action and school action plus or have an education, health and care plan.
- More students than average are supported by pupil premium funding.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The academy uses alternative provision, run by the local authority, for 12 students in Key Stage 4. Five attend on a part-time basis and spend the remainder of their time at Armthorpe. The remaining seven attend alternative provision full time.
- The academy also uses off-site provision for Key Stage 3 students. It is run by Armthorpe in conjunction with three other Doncaster schools at the local football club. Six Year 8 students attend – five on a part-time basis and the other one full time.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 4.
- Almost half of the teaching staff have joined the academy since its previous inspection as have two new senior leaders.
- The Consortium of Community Trusts is now known as the Yorkshire Education Trust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the more able students achieve at the highest possible level.
- Ensure all students use the opportunities given to respond to the constructive feedback from teachers in order to improve the quality of their work.
- Fully implement plans to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of all sixth form students.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership is improving strongly at all levels and leaders are increasingly ambitious for the academy and its students. Senior leadership is good and getting better. The headteacher has a very clear vision for the academy that is challenging but achievable and is shared by staff. Both the headteacher and his team lead from the front and are highly visible around the academy site before, during and after school. They also teach some of the most difficult classes giving them credibility with teachers.
- Leaders at all levels have a very accurate view of the academy. They have a carefully devised and well-used action plan that prioritises and addresses all the remaining weaknesses.
- The headteacher and his deputy steered the academy with great determination and skill through the very challenging period of high staff absence and changes that followed the previous inspection. Throughout that time they received excellent and very well-judged support from the Yorkshire Education Trust. Early in the journey out of special measures the Trust provided much needed additional leadership capacity but the Armthorpe team is now self-sufficient as was demonstrated when the deputy headteacher spearheaded a very successful campaign to improve behaviour in the spring term. The Trust continues to provide valuable support of a different kind. Hall Cross Academy, for example, gives technical support and processes student data. Armthorpe is now in a position to contribute to the Trust by sharing its best practice at joint professional development events, for example.
- Two new senior leaders joined the academy in the summer and an assistant headteacher returned from maternity leave. They are already having a big impact and have brought a new energy and ideas that have revitalised the whole team and accelerated improvements.
- Middle leadership is good and continues to develop. The team has a good mix of energetic young leaders from within the academy, experienced leaders and very promising new appointments. They work together well and are a driving force in bringing about improvements. The faculty leader in English, for example, has made an exceptional difference since joining the academy in January. He has built a strong and effective teaching team and the proportion of students achieving a grade C pass in GCSE English rose by 23% in the summer.
- Lines of accountability, an issue at the previous inspection, are very clear. Middle leaders are held to account and supported very well. Succession planning is strong. Nine members of staff are on a course for aspiring leaders and a number of posts have been created enabling promising leaders to gain experience. For example, a new associate leader has been tasked with building stronger links with the community, parents and local schools and has already had a big impact.
- The new National Curriculum has been introduced and the academy has embarked on a wide-reaching review of its own curriculum that takes account of national developments and local needs. The transition curriculum for Years 7 and 8 has been cleverly devised and is building students' resourcefulness and thinking skills. It also provides many opportunities to enhance students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. The current work on major religions is developing an appreciation of other cultures but is also opening up discussions about extremism and some of the issues underlying current conflicts. Work across the academy prior to Remembrance Day was very successful in encouraging students of all ages to reflect on British values, to question and to show respect.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance goes from strength to strength. Governors have developed the confidence and knowledge to challenge and question senior leaders. They also offer good support and advice when tough staffing decisions need to be taken and they make a valuable contribution to ensuring that performance management is rigorous.
 - They know the strengths and weaknesses of the academy very well. They have robust reporting systems that allow them to monitor all aspects of the academy's work closely and stronger links with the faculties are giving them a deeper insight into many of the issues.
 - They have fulfilled their statutory duties in relation to safeguarding and ensured that essential policies in relation to child protection, special educational needs and curriculum are available on the academy website.

The behaviour and safety of pupils requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. It has improved considerably over the past year and

students say that teachers are now free to teach and do not have to spend time dealing with disruptive students. However, not all students are taking responsibility for their own learning and too many need regular reminders from the teacher in order to stay focused on the work in hand.

- Students' behaviour around the academy is good. They move around in a calm and orderly way, are courteous to adults and show consideration to each other. There are fewer 'call outs' and when these occur they are generally for less serious offences. More students are receiving rewards and fewer are being penalised for poor behaviour. The number of exclusions has risen, however, as staff take a firmer stance.
- The new behaviour management system is applied consistently across the academy and the amount of low-level disruption in lessons is minimal. The vast majority of students understand why they must respond to 'reasonable requests' from members of staff and the academy is much more harmonious as a result. Students are learning the importance of courtesy, fairness and respect and appreciate that it is a two-way process.
- Attendance is improving and is in line with the national average. However, the number of persistent absentees is still high although home visits by the senior team and other initiatives have led to reductions. The academy is working with the most persistent absentees and their families on an individual basis and is involving an education welfare officer and other external agencies. Attendance data are analysed well. They show that the attendance in Year 7 is exceptionally high and compares very favourably with previous years at the same time. The attendance of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is lower than others except in Year 7 where the pattern is reversed. The attendance of students in alternative provision is checked weekly, daily where there are concerns, and the academy maintains links with all these students and their families.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. A very large majority of parents responding to the on-line questionnaire said that their child feels safe at the academy and very many of the students who spoke to inspectors agreed. However, a small number of students in Key Stage 3 did not feel that bullying was dealt with effectively and they also said that it is not a good idea to be openly gay at Armthorpe. Key Stage 4 students, on the other hand, were much more positive.
- The academy makes very thorough and prompt checks on new staff and other visitors to the academy and there is a high staff presence around the site before and after school, at break and lunchtimes and during changeovers. There are few reported incidents of bullying, racism and homophobic behaviour and they have been dealt with promptly.
- Students are very aware of the dangers of on-line chatrooms, cyber-bullying and the sexual exploitation of children and know what they can do to protect themselves. They say that they know much less about the dangers of extremism but schemes of work show that this will be covered later in the year.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is improving well but is not yet good. Many teachers are relatively new to teaching and are still honing their skills but they show a great deal of promise.
- The assistant headteacher with responsibility for developing teaching has a very accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement and has put together a comprehensive programme of professional development from which teachers can select sessions tailored to their individual teacher's needs.
- Teachers use a good variety of activities and resources to engage and hold students' interest. Students enjoy group work and discussions and timed tasks are used well to maintain a lively pace. In the weaker lessons, however, the pace slackens in the middle of the lesson often because the teacher becomes involved with a small group of students and does not notice that others have completed the task.
- Questioning is used very effectively and teachers often use follow-up questions to elicit extended answers and explanations but they do not always give students enough time to gather their thoughts. Students are encouraged to discuss ideas and teachers take opportunities to widen students' vocabulary and introduce subject-specific terminology.
- Students are often compliant but passive in the weaker lessons and, although the balance is shifting, too many students are still content to sit back and let the teacher do most of the work; this is limiting the progress that they are able to make.
- Teachers are using the detailed information available about each student to plan work that caters for the range of ability in the group. In the weaker lessons, however, the more able students have to complete all the routine tasks and exercises before they can move to the more challenging extension activities. This is

slowing their progress and dampening interest.

- The quality of marking and feedback is consistently good. Books are marked regularly and teachers give detailed feedback but students are not always making use of the advice and suggestions they have been given. Spellings are checked and corrected but grammar and punctuation mistakes are sometimes missed.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the academy in Year 7 with average prior attainment. Achievement is around average overall and is stronger in Key Stage 3. Data that track students' progress show that achievement is improving year-on-year.
- GCSE examination results in the summer showed a big improvement, especially in English where the number of students making expected progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 was more than double that of 2013. The proportion making expected progress in mathematics did not improve on the 2013 figure but the proportion of students leaving Year 11 with a GCSE pass at grade C or above increased by eight percentage points.
- The most able students are not achieving the highest grades and the proportion of students making better than expected progress is below average. Too many of the brightest students are happy with grade C passes at GCSE.
- The gap between disadvantaged students and others narrowed in 2014 but is not yet closed. This is based on the academy's analysis of the proportion of students who made expected progress in English and mathematics. The official data for 2014 are not yet published. In English, the gap between disadvantaged students and others narrowed by 11% taking it close to the 2013 national figure. In mathematics, the gap reduced by four percentage points which is less than the comparable 2013 national figure.
- Students supported by school action and those with an education, health and care plan make progress comparable to their peers. Students supported by school action plus, however, are not making sufficient progress. They are often the most disaffected students and attending alternative provision. Although they do not achieve as well as they should, many progress on to courses with training providers.
- In lessons students participate well in group work and enjoy lively discussions. They are keen to explain their work and show the progress they have made but not everyone takes a pride in their written work and presentation in some books is untidy.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- The academy offers AS and A levels, vocational courses at intermediate and advanced level and GCSE resits in English and mathematics. AS and A levels are run in collaboration with Danum Academy. Value added statistics show that students on vocational courses make expected progress but those on AS and A-level courses do less well, especially those on AS courses. Disadvantaged students do as well as others and sometimes better.
- The quality of teaching and learning varies. There is good teaching in the larger groups where students benefit from a rich learning environment. They are encouraged to research independently, join in fruitful discussions and learn from each other. In the small classes, however, these opportunities are lacking. Teachers know their subjects and students very well and offer good academic support outside of lessons.
- Students' progress is tracked carefully and they are supported well. Sixth formers say that they receive very good careers advice whether they are applying to university or looking for work. They all progress to further/higher education or find work at the end of their course. They are playing an increasing role in the life of the academy by acting as ambassadors, leading assemblies or supporting younger students.
- Leadership of the sixth form is improving and plans are already underway to change the curriculum to better meet the needs of students and the local area from next year.

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	138314
Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	450797

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
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	631
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sally Shearman
Headteacher	Andy Cope
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2013
Telephone number	01302 831582
Fax number	01302 300757
Email address	admin@armthorpe.doncaster.sch.uk

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