

Spires Academy

Bredlands Lane, Sturry, Canterbury, CT2 0HD

Inspection dates 13–14 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
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.

- Students' achievement requires improvement because progress in some subjects, particularly in mathematics, is too slow. Due to this, a significant minority of students do not make enough progress.
- The gap between the attainment of those students who are supported by the pupil premium and their peers has not closed enough.
- The proportion of most-able students reaching the highest levels of which they are capable is too low.
- Not all subject leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning effectively to ensure consistently good provision in their departments.
- Not all leaders use information on students' progress effectively to identify those needing extra help so they can make better progress.
- Behaviour requires improvement because low-level disruption slows the pace of learning in some lessons. Rates of exclusion are higher than the national average. They have recently increased due to a change in the way some behaviour is dealt with. Attendance is below average.
- Teaching requires improvement because not all staff consistently follow the academy's policies for managing behaviour and for giving guidance to students about their work. Work set is not always matched to their ability levels. As a result of this, students do not make consistently good progress.
- Some leaders have had recent significant changes to their roles and responsibilities, which has slowed the pace of improvements. Due to this, the impact of their work on students' achievement is limited.
- Students' achievement in the sixth form requires improvement. Their achievement is not consistently good.

The school has the following strengths:

- In some subjects, such as English, students make particularly good progress and attain well.
- The academy's procedures for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements and students feel safe.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good and there are good relationships between the students and their teachers.
- Governors are well informed and have high expectations and ambition for the academy, which is improving.
- Students who attend alternative provision make good progress from their starting points.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 32 lessons, six of which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors took account of the 65 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and 24 staff questionnaires.
- Meetings were held with three members of the governing body, a local authority representative, senior and middle leaders, teachers and representative groups of students. Informal conversations were held with students around the academy between lesson times.
- Inspectors observed the academy’s work and looked at samples of students’ work to look at the rate of progress and the quality of the assessment and marking processes. They also looked at progress information, documents about the academy’s development and evaluation, safeguarding information and records about attendance and behaviour.
- Information about the sixth form was limited as it has only been established since 2013 and the academy will be closing it at the end of the next academic year.

Inspection team

Moazam Parvez, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Neil Strowger

Additional Inspector

Christopher Lee

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Spires Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium funding, which is additional government funding for those students eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority, is much higher than the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is well above average.
- In 2014, the academy met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress by the end of Year 11.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes in staffing, including senior and middle leaders.
- There are a small number of students who attend alternative provision at The Canterbury Inclusion Service and Nu Steps who provide vocational courses such as construction and hair and beauty.
- There is collaborative partnership between Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School and the academy.
- The proportion of students with above average prior attainment is significantly below the national average.
- In 2014, the academy took in 92 students from a school that was closing in the local area. The prior attainment of most of these students was well below national averages.
- The academy opened a sixth form in 2013 to meet the needs of 30 students for whom further education elsewhere would have been difficult. The sixth form will be disbanded at the end of this academic year as links with sixth form colleges have been established however the academy will see out its obligation to the current students in the sixth form.
- Currently there are no examination results for the sixth form.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve progress and outcomes for all students in all year groups, particularly in mathematics, by ensuring :
 - school policies that impact directly on student learning are implemented consistently across subjects
 - leaders at all levels and teachers make better use of assessment information about all groups of students in order to identify and close any gaps in their learning
 - that subject leaders' monitoring of teaching focuses on students' progress and the quality of teaching, in particular how students are challenged so improving their knowledge and understanding
 - that teachers plan tasks that are matched appropriately to the ability and the needs of students
 - teachers' assessment and guidance to students is accurate and consistently good.
- Improve students' behaviour and safety over time so that they support more rapid progress by:
 - ensuring the academy's policy for behaviour management is followed more consistently by all staff
- Ensure students' attendance improves at a more rapid pace.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- The principal and executive principal have worked together effectively and have ensured that improvements in students' attainment and progress continue during a period of significant change in staffing and leadership. A large number of new staff and changes in leadership have all been managed well. However, leadership and management require improvement because the improvements in the quality of teaching and students' achievement have not been rapid enough.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning has been given greater priority with the creation of a new assistant vice-principal post in January 2015 for teaching and learning however this has not yet shown impact in ensuring consistency across all departments. Policies such as marking and behaviour management are not being consistently followed, particularly by staff new to the academy.
- The principal has tried to raise significantly expectations of the levels students can achieve across the academy. This has been more successful in some departments than others. Some departments have had significant staffing issues and this has slowed the progress of initiatives in these areas.
- The academy has a high proportion of staff new to the academy and many new to teaching, and the support for these staff is of a very high quality. The academy also provides support and training to new staff, and student teachers to its partner grammar school.
- Senior leaders monitor rigorously the progress, attendance and behaviour of students who attend alternative provision. These students make good progress from their starting points.
- The leaders have an accurate picture of the academy's strengths and areas for development. Leaders and managers have produced a clearly focused plan to further improve the academy's work. For example, they have identified the work that needs to be done to accelerate progress in mathematics and ensure that teaching is consistently good or better.
- New assistant vice-principals oversee improvements in subject areas where leadership has been weaker and support subject leaders to improve. This is beginning to have an impact on improving the quality of middle leaders although there remains too much variation across departments.
- While there are rigorous systems in place that link teachers' performance to salary progression, these have not yet resulted in consistently good teaching across the school.
- The academy's use of the Year 7 catch-up funding is improving the literacy levels of students who arrive with difficulties in reading. The pupil premium funding provides additional teaching to increase the rate of progress, particularly in English and mathematics. However, the impact of this is still too variable.
- Good quality training and support are provided for staff at all levels through coaching and mentoring as well as through weekly professional development opportunities.
- The academy's curriculum has been changed in order to meet more fully the needs of the students at the academy. There is a good balance of academic and work-related courses in Key Stage 4. Students receive independent careers advice so they are well informed about the options for the next stage in their lives.
- The close links with Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School provide opportunities for the more able students at post-16.
- The academy promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through its citizenship curriculum and a wide range of other opportunities. This includes 'buddying' Chinese and Taiwanese students who regularly visit the academy. Leaders promote equal opportunity well ensuring that the students have a good understanding of British values. For example, students are given opportunities in lessons to discuss topics such as democratic processes and cultural and religious differences, thus developing tolerance. This prepares students well for life in modern Britain.
- Safeguarding procedures fully meet requirements. Training in safer recruitment and child protection are all in place. Policies for behaviour, anti-bullying and equal opportunities are kept up to date by senior leaders and shared with governors.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have high expectations for the academy. They have supported senior leaders well through a period of change, but this has not yet resulted in more effective leadership and management. Governors are well-informed about the quality of teaching and student performance and are challenging the academy's leaders to improve students' attainment and progress.
 - Governors know how the academy manages the performance of teachers. They understand the link between teachers' performance and pay progression and this is rigorously monitored so that only effective teachers progress up the pay scales. The governing body has a breadth of expertise which includes financial management and leadership, but this expertise has not yet resulted in the academy

improving to good levels of effectiveness.

- The governing body knows about how additional funding, such as the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding, is spent and recognises that it is not yet being used effectively to ensure those students eligible for extra funding make good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- In a significant number of lessons over time, some students' disruption slows the pace of learning for all. This is especially true where the activities in the lesson are not challenging them or meeting their needs. When activities are well matched to students' abilities behaviour is more positive and students work well together and are able to sustain attention on their work.
- Around the academy, students are generally helpful and relationships are pleasant. They open doors for one another and are friendly and confident. There is very little litter or graffiti around the site.
- The academy's behaviour management system is not being implemented consistently by all staff, which results in some inconsistent expectation of what constitutes good behaviour.
- The number of students excluded from lessons has recently increased as the academy has become less tolerant of unacceptable behaviour. The academy works hard to ensure that when students return from exclusion that they are supported through an action plan that will help them improve their behaviour.
- Senior leaders maintain good records of students excluded from the academy and review them regularly. Fixed term exclusions are above average as a result of the academy's focus on reducing unacceptable behaviour. Exclusions are beginning to fall.
- The small numbers of students who attend alternative provision are looked after well by the academy. This is exemplified by a member of the academy's staff who is based at 'Nu Steps' to monitor progress and attendance.
- The academy has employed an attendance officer and as a result students' attendance is improving slowly, although it remains below the national average.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure requires improvement.
- Students feel safe in the academy and are confident that staff will deal with any incidents of bullying that might occur. However, they feel that staff could be more consistent in addressing language that could be interpreted as being homophobic.
- Students know how to stay safe online and are aware of the possible pitfalls of using social media. Through the personal, social and health education programme external speakers, such as paramedics and road safety officers, help them understand the wider health and safety issues they might experience outside of the academy.
- Arrangements to keep students safe and to promote their good behaviour when attending off-site provision are good.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because the planning of lessons by too many teachers does not meet the needs of the students, particularly the more able. Teachers' marking and feedback on students' work and management of behaviour is also inconsistent. As a result students' progress is not as good as it should be.
- Where students make better progress, teachers use a wide range of approaches to help enhance their learning. In these lessons, teaching is adapted to maintain interest and engagement in the subject being studied. In one religious education lesson, the Year 9 students, responding to the high expectation of the teacher, were totally engaged in attempting a difficult GCSE question on the opposing views of abortion.
- Teaching in English is particularly successful and is improving students' progress because teachers have high expectations and plan activities that are challenging. Teaching in mathematics, however, has been affected by a large turnover of staff and the use of non-specialist teachers, some who do not have the required in-depth subject knowledge. This has resulted in students not experiencing consistently good teaching and so not making the progress expected.
- The academy has introduced 'Communication Champions', these are members of staff whose role is to ensure that literacy and numeracy skills are being developed and delivered consistently across the academy. They are having a positive impact as there is now a clear focus on these aspects across

subjects. The Basic Skills Quality Mark that the academy is undertaking is also helping support the effective development of these skills across all subject areas.

- Literacy skills are further enhanced through the reading intervention programme which includes the requirement for students to read within lessons for 10 minutes on three days a week.
- The curriculum ensures that students benefit from a good balance of academic and vocational subjects. For example, teachers in drama, music and art give students good quality experiences which engage them and provide opportunities that develop skills beyond traditional academic subjects.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because students make inconsistent progress across the academy. There are significant variations across subjects and in different classes.
- In 2014, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, increased from a low point in 2013, however it is still below the national average. The proportion of students both achieving and exceeding expected progress in English was much higher than the national average; however, the proportion making or exceeding expected progress in mathematics was below the national average.
- Inappropriate early entry to GCSE in mathematics has been a factor in the weaker progress made by students and in 2014 did limit the number of grades at B or above achieved. Early entry in mathematics no longer takes place.
- Achievement in mathematics is now improving because the new head of department's actions to improve standards are making a difference and the quality of teaching and marking has risen. Teachers' assessments of students' achievements in mathematics are now more accurate. This is leading to an improving trend in the attainment of students in mathematics.
- In 2014, the gap between disadvantaged students in the academy and other students nationally was too wide. In mathematics, disadvantaged students were more than two GCSE grades behind other students nationally and one and a half GCSE grades behind other students in the academy. In English, the students were one and a half GCSE grades behind in comparison to other students nationally and other students in the academy. However, the academy's current data show an improving picture in all year groups this year and gaps are narrowing rapidly.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs are now making progress similar to that of others across the academy
- The progress of the most able students in the academy is variable. In 2014 the proportion of these students who made expected or more than expected progress in English was better than that seen nationally, however in mathematics their progress is well below the national average.
- The small numbers of students who attend off-site provision make good progress as a result of the careful attention to their needs.

The sixth form provision

requires improvement

- Sixth form provision requires improvement.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form require improvement. There is insufficient data on students' achievement overall which can be analysed to show strengths and clearly identify areas where most improvement is needed. Thus, monitoring of performance is inconsistent.
- Achievement in the sixth form requires improvement because the progress made by students is too variable particularly in mathematics.
- Students are expected to study GCSE English and mathematics if they did not achieve a good grade in Year 11; however the success rate is low. Teaching, particularly of the GCSE course in mathematics, is not consistently good.
- The curriculum in the sixth form is limited and consists of mostly vocational and re-sit GCSE courses in order to meet the very specific needs of a small number of students. Sound advice is provided on the next steps students can choose.
- Behaviour in the sixth form is good. There are good relationships between the students and their teachers. Students feel safe, know how to keep themselves safe, and understand issues related to discrimination and diversity and are tolerant of difference.
- Attendance rates in the sixth form are low but are improving as a result of the actions taken by the new attendance officer.

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	135305
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	462416

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
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	600
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	30
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gerry Pack
Headteacher	Nicola Mattin
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 May 2013
Telephone number	01227 710392
Fax number	01227 712370
Email address	office@spiresacademy.com

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