

# University of Chester Academy Northwich

Shipbrook Road, Rudheath, Northwich, Cheshire CW9 7DT

## Inspection dates

1–2 December 2015

## Overall effectiveness

**Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- While teaching is improving, not enough is good or better.
- In a minority of lessons, activities are not planned so as to meet the learning needs of all pupils.
- Not enough pupils make expected progress in English, geography, history and business studies.
- The most-able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged in lessons or given opportunities to achieve to their best.
- Spelling and grammatical errors are not corrected in some pupils' exercise books.
- Gaps in literacy, numeracy and communication skills are not closed rapidly enough in Year 7. A strong pupil reading culture has yet to be embedded across the academy.

### The school has the following strengths

- Strong senior leadership is bringing about change rapidly and with a relentless focus on improvement.
- Changes to middle leadership have strengthened the academy's capacity to improve further.
- Staff have enthusiastically embraced the need, and ways and means, towards improvement with a stronger focus on pupil progress.
- Well-focused staff training and links with outstanding schools are enabling academy leaders and teachers to improve their skills.
- Pupils are making better progress and their attainment is improving.
- Pupils make good progress in mathematics and science. The arts are a significant strength of the academy.
- The academy is a safe, calm and harmonious environment that pupils enjoy attending.
- Governance is strong and exceptionally well focused on building capacity and strengthening provision.
- The University of Chester Multi-Academy Trust (UCAT) offers very good support on improvement planning and staff training.

## 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.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching that requires improvement so that it is good and increase the amount of outstanding teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
  - work on the use of their questioning skills so that pupils have opportunities to develop their reasoning and spoken language, and extend their thinking
  - when using group work, organise it effectively so that all pupils are engaged and make good progress
  - regularly correct spelling and grammatical errors in pupils' written work
  - plan lessons using assessment information that will support and challenge all pupils
  - plan opportunities for pupils to record and reflect upon their learning.
- Ensure that pupils make better and more rapid progress by ensuring that:
  - English, history, geography and business studies rapidly improve the percentage of pupils achieving expected progress and better
  - the most-able pupils do better and have access to sufficiently challenging resources and extension work.
- Ensure that a culture of high expectations and aspirations is further embedded through the development of:
  - a reading culture that enables all pupils to read and write with greater accuracy, confidence and self-assurance
  - ways to close the deficits in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and communication more quickly in Year 7.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Following the inspection that placed the academy in special measures, little direction or focused improvement planning with impact occurred during the first year. Over the last 12 months, under a new Principal, senior leadership team and Chair of the Statement of Action Committee (Governing Body), the academy has been transformed. Leadership and management within the academy are now strong, ambitious and very robust in promoting improvement.
- The new Principal quickly appointed a highly talented team of vice-principals with previous experience in outstanding schools. This group relentlessly drives improvement. They quickly established new systems and ways of working which had a strong focus on teaching and learning and pupil progress. New data systems are very thorough and pinpoint the crucial areas for improvement within both subjects and for individual pupils.
- The new senior leadership team, using external help and guidance, quickly established staff support and confidence in the need for rapid improvement and change. Staff morale is now high. New staff were appointed to key middle leadership positions and as teachers. Recent appointments have further strengthened the academy. Key middle managers are effective and fully embrace greater accountability and responsibility. They are leaders within their areas of teaching and learning.
- Self-evaluation is accurate, highly critical and links very well into improvement and development planning. Above all, the academy's leaders recognise where they need to improve further and go about this process with vigour and effective application. They accurately identified the key areas for improvement noted by inspectors.
- The leadership of teaching and learning is good. High expectations have been established. The evaluation of the quality of teaching is accurate. Areas for further development have been accurately recognised and action plans for improvement implemented and driven forward. Continuing professional development for staff is very well planned and benefits greatly from work within the UCAT network as well as partnerships with several outstanding schools.
- The management of teachers' performance including appraisal are very robust. There are strong, supportive systems to enable improvement and development. School leaders have taken strong action where improvement does not progress at a sufficiently robust pace and staff have left the academy as a consequence.
- The curriculum has now been reorganised and offers a broad and balanced range of subjects at both key stages. There is a stronger focus on developing an academic curriculum to match the developing expectations and aspirations of pupils. There remains a strong emphasis on the arts which is a strength of the academy. An increasingly strong enrichment curriculum is supported by UCAT. A reading recovery programme is effective in improving pupils' reading ages in Years 7 and 8 but a culture of reading for pleasure needs further extension and embedding.
- Pupil premium funding is effectively used and gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their peers are closing.
- The academy has a very strong and effective focus on developing pupils' understanding of British society and the responsibilities of a citizen living within a democratic and multicultural society.
- The academy uses the UCAT network exceedingly well to enrich staff and pupil experience. Links with outstanding schools have helped to inform academy practice. UCAT has streamlined its operation and is now a more effective and strategic organisation that is having a real impact on improving the academy and the learning possibilities for its pupils.
- Academy surveys indicate strong support from parents. Communications with parents are strong. The recently introduced UCAT-designed mobile phone 'parents' app' has enhanced communication between the academy and parents and has improved parents' ease of access to a wide range of academy information.
- **The governance of the school**
  - Members of the Statement of Action Committee are very well informed on the academy's work and progress. They meet fortnightly. The Chair is highly experienced with great drive and a very robust approach to performance and performance management. Nothing escapes his scrutiny. The Statement of Action Committee's impact in setting the highest standards has helped the academy to move forward rapidly and embrace the highest expectations.

- The Statement of Action Committee is very well informed on pupil progress and the progress of distinct pupil groups. Its members scrutinise in great detail the spending and impact of pupil premium funding.
  - The Statement of Action Committee regularly meets with senior and middle leaders to review progress across all areas of academy work. They know pupils well and have a good understanding of their views on teaching and learning. Members undertake learning walks to better understand the quality of teaching and learning.
  - Their planning for the future is excellent. They have formed a shadow group which will eventually become the local governing body of the academy. This shadow group has the advantage of observing excellent practice in conducting the governance of the academy.
  - The Statement of Action Committee is well informed on safeguarding and the academy's approach to developing pupils' understanding of British values and the Prevent strategy.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement**

- Teaching and learning are improving quickly. However, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning over time remain in a minority of lessons. There is not enough consistently good and better teaching within and across all subjects. The academy has the capacity to improve further because inadequate teaching has been eliminated and there is a growing percentage of good and better teaching that informs improvement planning.
- In a significant minority of lessons, planning fails to meet the needs of all pupils. When group work is used, it often proves unproductive because of ineffective planning to enable all pupils to be fully engaged. Teachers' questioning is shallow and fails to get pupils thinking more deeply. Pupils are not given sufficient time to record and reflect upon their learning. The most-able pupils do not always achieve to their best and beyond. They are not always stretched and challenged in their learning and in the extension work available to them.
- Marking is regular and often developmental with a strong focus on noting the next steps to further understanding. In the most effective marking, a positive dialogue has developed between teacher and pupil on progress and improvement. However, inspectors found that in too many exercise books spelling and grammatical errors went uncorrected.
- A reading recovery programme in Years 7 and 8 has improved pupils' reading ages significantly. However, academy leaders recognise the need to more rapidly tackle pupil deficits in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and communication in Year 7. A culture of reading for pleasure has not been embedded extensively.
- Where teaching is good or better, pupils gain in confidence and self-reliance, and develop quickly as independent and enthusiastic learners. In these lessons, they grasp with enthusiasm opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding. They enjoy challenge and respond with enthusiasm and exemplary focus and commitment. In these lessons, teachers use questioning well to develop deeper pupil thinking and understanding. Lesson planning meets the learning needs of all pupils. High-quality learning was observed in drama, art, mathematics and science.
- High-quality continuing professional development for all teachers informs them about best practice and the ways and means to ensure that all teaching and learning are good and much are better. There are now more opportunities for sharing good practice across the academy.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

**is good**

#### **Personal development and welfare**

- The academy's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The academy is a harmonious and calm environment. Relationships between adults and pupils are good and constructive. Pupils engage well with each other and have positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils have increasing opportunities to develop their leadership skills acting as prefects, librarians, year representatives, members of the junior leadership team and support mentors. They have embraced these

opportunities with enthusiasm.

- An array of additional activities enhance pupils' personal development. New pupil societies are mushrooming such as the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) group.
- The UCAT two-week experience in the summer term provides a vast array of well-planned and imaginative activities that inform and challenge pupils. For example, one group of pupils visited the four great historic libraries of Manchester in a project designed to access the impact of libraries on citizens. All year groups during these weeks visit the University of Chester campus as a means of promoting high aspirations in learning.
- Pupils wear their uniforms with pride. They keep the academy environment tidy. They are also actively engaged in ways to improve the academy environment further. For example pupils are currently organising events and sponsorship activities to install solar panels to increase the energy efficiency of the academy.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the academy campus is good. Academy records reflect strong pupil adherence to the academy's behaviour code. Pupils move in a very orderly manner to lessons and are quick to settle down to work.
- Attendance is good. Attendance is now above the national average for all groups of pupils. Pupils appreciate a strong rewards culture which focuses on achievement, effort and positive contributions to academy life. Exclusions are low.
- Low-level disruption is rare. Pupils spoken to said that incidents of bullying were very rare and if they do occur they are dealt with quickly. Pupils are well informed about different aspects of bullying, including cyber- and homophobic bullying.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **require improvement**

- Pupil attainment and progress have improved. However, there remains a minority of subjects at Key Stage 4 where improvement is not yet sufficiently rapid or fully embedded.
- In English, expected progress is below the national average and is currently not accelerating at a sufficiently rapid rate. A low percentage of pupils in English are making better than expected progress at Key Stage 4. Academy leaders also acknowledge that more pupils need to do better in history, geography and business studies.
- Reading ages are tracked and monitored. Many pupils are making very good progress in improving their reading ages. However, academy leaders are aware that a reading culture has not yet been embedded sufficiently within the academy.
- Not enough of the most-able pupils achieve more than expected progress. In too many lessons, they are not sufficiently challenged and nor do they have access to high-level extension work to stretch them so that they achieve their very best across all subjects.
- The progress of pupils with disabilities or those with special educational needs in 2014/15 was below the rate of progress made by their peers. The academy has appointed new staff and initiated other changes to improve provision. It is too early to measure impact.
- Academy information for Key Stage 3 indicates that the majority of pupils are on track for making expected progress. An increasing number of pupils are making better than expected progress. Gaps at this key stage are narrowing quickly. Lesson observations undertaken and the scrutiny of a wide range of work during the inspection confirmed that current pupils at this key stage are doing well.
- Gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and their academy peers are narrowing rapidly. Disadvantaged pupils are doing increasingly well in mathematics, science and across a broad range of subjects at both key stages.
- More pupils are now making expected progress in mathematics at Key Stage 4. Expected progress for mathematics is at the national average and academy information indicates that this will improve further for current pupils. There is a strong upward trend in the percentage of pupils making better than expected progress in mathematics. In science, pupil progress has accelerated and reflects very good teaching practice within this area.

- GCSE results for five A\*–C grades including in English and mathematics in 2014/15 increased and confirmed a three-year improvement trend. Pupils did well in science, French, Spanish, drama, dance, art, religious studies and ICT.
- Information, advice and guidance for pupils are well organised and strongly focused on raising aspirations. Good links with local colleges have ensured strong progression to post-16 education.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137582
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	10005420

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	383
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Steve Whatmore
<b>Principal</b>	Cath Green
<b>Telephone number</b>	01606 42515
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ucanorthwich.org">www.ucanorthwich.org</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin@UCANorthwich.org">admin@UCANorthwich.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	5–6 February 2014

## Information about this school

- The University of Chester Academy Northwich is a below average-sized, mixed academy.
- The majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is well above the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs is above the national average.
- The academy receives support through the University of Chester Multi-Academy Trust network of academies. It also has received support from a number of outstanding schools, including Cheadle Hulme High School and St John Plessington Catholic College. Support is also brokered with Cheshire Vale Teaching School.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The academy offers no alternative provision.
- Since the last inspection, the academy has undergone significant staffing changes. It has a new Principal, vice-principal, assistant principal and subject leaders of English, science and mathematics. A significant number of new teachers have been appointed. A new Chair of the Statement of Action Committee has also been appointed.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in a wide range of subjects across the academy in different age groups. Two lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Four extensive learning walks were undertaken by inspectors accompanied by a senior leader. Inspectors looked closely at samples of disadvantaged and more-able pupils' written work in a range of subjects and year groups. They also watched pupils' behaviour around the academy.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders and two groups of pupils. Inspectors met with the Chair of the Statement of Action Committee. A meeting was held with the Chief Executive of the University of Chester Multi-Academy Trust.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation including: self-evaluation and development plans; information relating to pupils' attainment and progress; information on attendance; documents and records about behaviour and safeguarding; records of checks on teaching and learning and of teachers' performance management; and the minutes of meetings of the Statement of Action Committee.
- Twenty-five parents responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and inspectors considered their views. Inspectors also reviewed the academy's own records of feedback from parents, staff and pupils.

## Inspection team

Patrick Geraghty, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steven Caldecott	Ofsted Inspector
Elizabeth Haddock	Ofsted Inspector

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